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# GRIFFITH GAUNT.

VOL. I.

LONDON : PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD-STREET  
AND CHURCH LANE.

# GRIFFITH GAUNT;

OR,

## JEALOUSY.

BY CHARLES READE.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL I.

THIRD EDITION.

LONDON:

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1867.

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# GRIFFITH GAUNT.

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## CHAPTER I.

“THEN I say once for all, that priest shall never darken my doors again.”

“Then I say they are my doors and not yours, and that holy man shall brighten them whenever he will.”

The gentleman and lady, who faced each other pale and furious, and interchanged this bitter defiance, were man and wife. And had loved each other well.

Miss Catherine Peyton was a young lady of

ancient family in Cumberland, and the most striking, but least popular, beauty in the county. She was very tall and straight, and carried herself a little too imperiously; yet she would sometimes relax and all but dissolve that haughty figure, and hang sweetly drooping over her favourites: then the contrast was delicious, and the woman fascinating.

Her hair was golden and glossy; her eyes a lovely grey; and she had a way of turning them on slowly and full, so that their victim could not fail to observe two things: 1. that they were grand and beautiful orbs; 2. that they were thoughtfully overlooking him instead of looking at him.

So contemplated by glorious eyes, a man feels small; and bitter.

Catherine was apt to receive the blunt compliments of the Cumberland squires with this sweet, celestial, superior gaze, and for this, and

other imperial charms, was more admired than liked.

The family estate was entailed on her brother ; her father spent every farthing he could ; so she had no money, and no expectations, except from a distant cousin, Mr. Charlton, of Hernshaw Castle and Bolton Hall.

Even these soon dwindled : Mr. Charlton took a fancy to his late wife's relation, Griffith Gaunt, and had him into his house, and treated him as his heir. This disheartened two admirers who had hitherto sustained Catherine Peyton's gaze, and they retired. Comely girls, girls long-nosed but rich, girls snub-nosed but winning, married on all sides of her, but the imperial beauty remained Miss Peyton at two-and-twenty.

She was rather kind to the poor ; would give them money out of her slender purse, and would even make clothes for the women, and sometimes read to them (very few of them could read to

themselves in that day). All she required in return was that they should be Roman Catholics, like herself, or at least pretend they might be brought to that faith by little and little.

She was a high-minded girl; and could be a womanly one—whenever she chose.

She hunted about twice a week in the season, and was at home in the saddle, for she had ridden from a child; but so ingrained was her character, that this sport, which more or less unsexes most women, had no perceptible effect on her mind nor even on her manners. The scarlet riding-habit, and little purple cap, and the great white bony horse she rode, were often seen in a good place at the end of a long run: but, for all that, the lady was a most ungenial fox-huntress; she never spoke a word but to her acquaintances, and wore a settled air of dreamy indifference, except when the hounds happened to be in full cry, and she galloping at their heels. Worse than that, when



the hounds were running into the fox, and his fate certain, she had been known to rein in her struggling horse, and pace thoughtfully home, instead of coming in at the death, and claiming the brush.

One day being complimented, at the end of a hard run, by the gentleman who kept the hounds, she turned her celestial orbs on him and said, "Nay, Sir Ralph, I love to gallop; and this sorry business it gives me an excuse."

It was full a hundred years ago: the country teemed with foxes; but it abounded in stiff coverts, and a knowing fox was sure to run from one to another; and then came wearisome efforts to dislodge him; and then Miss Peyton's grey eyes used to explore vacancy, and ignore her companions, biped and quadruped.

: But one day they drew Yewtree Brow and found a stray fox. At Gaylad's first note he

broke cover and went away for home across the open country. A hedger saw him steal out, and gave a view halloo; the riders came round helter skelter; the hounds in cover one by one threw up their noses and voices; the horns blew, the canine music swelled to a strong chorus, and away they swept across country, dogs, horses, men; and the deuce take the hindmost.

It was a gallant chase, and our dreamy virgin's blood got up. Erect, but lithe and vigorous, and one with her great white gelding, she came flying behind the foremost riders, and took leap for leap with them; one glossy, golden curl streamed back in the rushing air, her grey eyes glowed with earthly fire, and two red spots on the upper part of her cheeks showed she was much excited without a grain of fear; yet in the first ten minutes one gentleman was unhorsed before her eyes, and one came to grief along with his animal, and a thorough-bred chestnut was galloping and snorting

beside her with empty saddle. Presently young Featherstone, who led her by about fifteen yards, crashed through a high hedge, and was seen no more, but heard wallowing in the deep unsuspected ditch beyond. There was no time to draw bridle. "Lie still, sir, if you please," said Catherine, with cool civility; then up rein, in spur, and she cleared the ditch and its muddy contents, alive and dead, and away without looking behind her.

On, on, on, till all the pinks and buckskins, erst so smart, were splashed with clay and dirt of every hue, and all the horses' late glossy coats were bathed with sweat and lathered with foam, and their gaping nostrils blowing and glowing red; and then it was that Harrowden brook, swollen wide and deep by the late rains, came right between the fox and Dogmore underwood, for which he was making.

The hunt sweeping down a hill-side caught sight of Reynard running for the brook. They

made sure of him now. But he lapped a drop, and then slipped in, and soon crawled out on the other side, and made feebly for the covert, weighted with wet fur.

At sight of him the hunt hallooed and trumpeted, and came tearing on with fresh vigour. †

But, when they came near the brook, lo! it was twenty feet wide, and running fast and brown. Some riders skirted it, looking for a narrow part. Two horses, being spurred at it, came to the bank, and then went rearing round on their heels, depositing one hat and another rider in the current. One gallant steed planted his feet like a tower, and snorted down at the water. One flopped gravely in and had to swim, and be dragged out. Another leaped, and landed with his feet on the other bank, his haunches in the water, and his rider curled round his neck and glaring out between his retroverted ears.

But Miss Peyton encouraged her horse with

spur and voice, set her teeth, turned rather pale this time, and went at the brook with a rush, and cleared it like a deer. She and the huntsman were almost alone together on the other side, and were as close to the hounds as the hounds were to poor pug, when he slipped through a run in a quickset hedge, and glided into Dogmore underwood, a stiff hazel coppice of five years' growth.

The other riders soon straggled up, and then the thing was to get him out again. There were a few narrow roads cut in the underwood, and up and down these the huntsman and whipper-in went trotting, and encouraged the staunch hounds, and whipped the skulkers back into covert. Others galloped uselessly about, pounding the earth, for daisy-cutters were few in those days; and Miss Peyton relapsed into the transcendental. She sat in one place with her elbow on her knee, and her fair chin supported by two fingers, as un-

disturbed by the fracas of horns and voices as an equestrian statue of Diana.

She sat so still, and so long, at a corner of the underwood, that at last the harassed fox stole out close to her, with lolling tongue and eye askant, and took the open field again. She thrilled at first sight of him, and her cheeks burned ; but her quick eye took in all the signs of his distress, and she sat quiet and watched him coolly. Not so her horse ; he plunged and then trembled all over, and planted his fore-feet together at this angle \, and parted his hind-legs a little, and so stood quivering, with cocked ears, and peeped over a low paling at the retiring quadruped ; and fretted and sweated, in anticipation of the gallop his long head told him was to follow. He looked a deal more statuesque than any three statues in England ; and all about a creature not up to his knee—and by-the-by ; the gentlemen that carve horses in our native isle, did they ever see one ?—Out of an omnibus ? The

whipper-in came by and found him in this gallant attitude, and suspected the truth ; but, observing the rider's tranquil position, thought the fox had only popped out and then in again. However, he fell in with the huntsman and told him Miss Peyton's grey had seen something. The hounds appeared puzzled ; and so the huntsman rode round to Miss Peyton, and, touching his cap, asked her if she had seen anything of the fox.

She looked him dreamily in the face. "The fox," said she : "he broke cover ten minutes ago."

The man blew his horn lustily, and then asked her reproachfully why she had not tally-hoed him, or winded her horn ; with that he blew his own again impatiently. Miss Peyton replied very slowly and pensively that the fox had come out soiled and fatigued, and trailing his brush. "I looked at him," said she, "and I pitied him ; he was one, and we are many ; he was so little, and we are so big : he had given us a good gallop ;

and so I made up my mind he should live to run another day."

The huntsman stared stupidly at her for a moment, then burst into a torrent of oaths, then blew his horn till it was hoarse, then cursed and swore till he was hoarse himself; then to his horn again, and dogs and men came rushing to the sound.

"Couple up and go home to supper," said Miss Peyton, quietly. "The fox is half-way to Gallows-tree Gorse, and you won't get him out of that this afternoon, I promise you."

As she said this, she just touched her horse with the spur, leaped the low hedge in front of her, and cantered slowly home across country; she was one that seldom troubled the hard road, go where she would.

She had ridden about a mile when she heard a horse's feet behind her; she smiled, and her colour rose a little, but she cantered on.



"Halt! in the King's name," shouted a mellow voice, and a gentleman galloped up to her side, and reined in his mare.

"What! have they killed?" inquired Catherine, demurely.

"Not they; he is in the middle of Gallowstree Gorse by now."

"And is this the way to Gallowstree Gorse?"

"Nay, mistress," said the young man; "but, when the fox heads one way and the deer another, what is a poor hunter to do?"

"Follow the slower, it seems."

"Say the lovelier and the dearer, sweet Kate."

"Now, Griffith, you know I hate flattery," said Kate; and the next moment came a soft smile, and belied this unsocial sentiment.

"Flattery?" said the lover. "I have no tongue to speak half your praise. I think the people in this country are as blind as bats, or they'd——"

"All except Mr. Griffith Gaunt; *he* has found

a paragon where wiser people see a wayward, capricious girl."

"Then *he* is the man for you. Don't you see that, mistress?"

"No, I don't quite see that," said the lady, drily.

This cavalier reply caused a dismay the speaker never intended. The fact is, Mr. George Neville, young, handsome, and rich, had lately settled in the county, and had been greatly smitten with Kate. The county was talking about it, and Griffith had been secretly on thorns for some days past. And now he could hide his uneasiness no longer; he cried out, in a sharp, trembling voice, "Why, Kate, my dear Kate, what, could you love any man but me? Could you be so cruel?—could you? There, let me get off my horse, and lie down on this stubble, and you ride over me, and trample me to death. I would rather have you trample on my ribs, than on my heart with loving any one but me."

“Why, what now?” said Catherine, drawing herself up. “I must scold you handsomely;” and she drew rein and turned full upon him; but by this means she saw his face was full of real distress; so, instead of reprimanding him, she said gently, “Why, Griffith, what is to do? Are you not my servant? Do not I send you word whenever I dine from home?”

“Yes, dearest; and then I call at that house, and stick there till they guess what I would be at, and ask me too.”

Catherine smiled; and proceeded to remind him that thrice a week she permitted him to ride over from Bolton (a distance of fifteen miles) to see her.

“Yes,” replied Griffith, “and I must say you always come, wet or dry, to the shrubbery gate, and put your hand in mine a minute. And Kate,” said he piteously, “at the bare thought of your putting that same dear hand in another man’s, my

heart turns sick within me, and my skin burns and trembles on me."

"But you have no cause," said Catherine, soothingly. "Nobody, except yourself, doubts my affection for you. You are often thrown in my teeth, Griffith—and (clenching her own) I like you all the better—of course."

Griffith replied with a burst of gratitude: and then, as men will, proceeded to encroach. "Ah," said he, "if you would but pluck up courage, and take the matrimonial fence with me at once."

Miss Peyton sighed at that and drooped a little upon her saddle. After a pause, she enumerated the "just impediments." She reminded him that neither of them had means to marry on.

He made light of that, he should soon have plenty; Mr. Charlton had as good as told him he was to have Bolton Hall and Grange: "Six hundred acres, Kate, besides the park and paddocks."

In his warmth he forgot that Catherine was to have been Mr. Charlton's heir. Catherine was too high-minded to bear Griffith any grudge; but she coloured a little, and said she was averse to come to him a penniless bride.

"Why, what matters it which of us has the dross, so that there is enough for both?" said Griffith, with an air of astonishment.

Catherine smiled approbation, and tacitly yielded that point. But then she objected the difference in their faith.

"Oh, honest folk get to heaven by different roads," said Griffith, carelessly.

"I have been taught otherwise," replied Catherine, gravely.

"Then give me your hand and I'll give you my soul," said Griffith Gaunt, impetuously. "I'll go to heaven your way, if you can't go mine. Anything sooner than be parted in this world, or the next."

She looked at him in silence ; and it was in a faint half apologetic tone she objected that all her kinsfolk were set against it."

"It is not their business ; it is ours," was the prompt reply.

"Well, then," said Catherine, sadly, "I suppose I must tell you the true reason ; I feel I should not make you happy ; I do not love you quite as you want to be loved, as you deserve to be loved. You need not look so ; nothing in flesh and blood is your rival. But my heart it bleeds for the church I think of her ancient glory in this kingdom, and, when I see her present condition, I long to devote myself to her service. I am very fit to be an abbess or a nun ; most unfit to be a wife. No, no ; I must not, ought not, dare not, marry a Protestant. Take the advice of one who esteems you dearly ; leave me—fly from me—forget me—do everything but hate me. Nay, do not hate me : you little know the struggle in

my mind. Farewell ; the saints, whom you scorn, watch over and protect you : farewell."

And with this she sighed, and struck her spur into the grey, and he darted off at a gallop.

Griffith, little able to cope with such a character as this, sat petrified, and would have been rooted to the spot if he had happened to be on foot. But his mare set off after her companion, and a chase of a novel kind commenced. Catherine's horse was fresher than Griffith's mare, and the latter, not being urged by her petrified master, lost ground.

But, when she drew near to her father's gate, Catherine relaxed her speed, and Griffith rejoined her.

She had already half relented, and only wanted a warm and resolute wooer to bring her round. But Griffith was too sore, and too little versed in woman. Full of suspicion and bitterness he paced gloomy and silent by her side, till they

reached the great avenue that led to her father's house.

And, while he rides alongside the capricious creature in sulky silence, I may as well reveal a certain foible in his own character.

This Griffith Gaunt was by no means deficient in physical courage; but he was instinctively disposed to run away from mental pain the moment he lost hope of driving it away from him. For instance, if Catherine had been ill and her life in danger, he would have ridden day and night to save her; but if she had died he would either have killed himself, or else fled the country, and so escaped the sight of every object that was associated with her, and could agonize him. I do not think he could have attended the funeral of one he loved.

The mind, as well as the body, has its self-protecting instincts. This of Griffith's was after all an instinct of that class, and, under certain circum-



stances, is true wisdom. But Griffith, I think, carried the instinct to excess; and that is why I call it his foible.

“Catherine,” said he, resolutely, “let me ride by your side to the house for once; for I read your advice my own way, and I mean to follow it: after to-day you will be troubled with me no more. I have loved you these three years, I have courted you these two years, and I am none the nearer. I see I am not the man you mean to marry; so I shall do as my father did, ride down to the coast, and sell my horse, and ship for foreign parts.”

“Oh! as you will,” said Catherine, haughtily. She quite forgot she had just recommended him to do something of this very kind.

Presently she stole a look. His fine ruddy cheek was pale; his manly brown eyes were moist; yet a gloomy and resolute expression on his tight-drawn lips. She looked at him sidelong,

and thought how often he had ridden thirty miles on that very mare to get a word with her at the shrubbery gate. And now the mare to be sold ! The man to go broken-hearted to sea ; perhaps to his death ! Her good heart began to yearn. " Griffith," said she, softly, " it is not as if I was going to wed anybody else. Is it nothing to be preferred by her you say you love ? If I was you I would do nothing rash ? Why not give me a little time ? In truth, I hardly know my own mind about it two days together."

" Kate," said the young man, firmly, " I am courting you this two years. If I wait two years more it will be but to see the right man come and carry you in a month ; for so girls are won when they are won at all. Your sister that is married and dead she held Josh Pitt in hand for years ; and what is the upshot ? Why, he wears the willow for her to this day ; and her husband, he married again before her grave was green. Nay, I have

done all an honest man can do to woo you ; so take me now or let me go."

At this, Kate began to waver secretly, and ask herself whether it would not be better to yield, since he was so resolute.

But the unlucky fellow did not leave well alone. He went on to say, "Once out of sight of this place I may cure myself of my fancy. Here I never could."

"Oh!" said Catherine, directly, "if you are so bent on being cured, it would not become me to say nay."

Griffith Gaunt bit his lip and hung his head, and made no reply.

The patience with which he received her hard speech was more apparent than real: but it told. Catherine, receiving no fresh positive provocation, relented again of her own accord, and, after a considerable silence, whispered softly, "Think how we should all miss you."

Here was an overture to reconciliation. But

unfortunately it brought out what had long been rankling in Griffith's mind, and was in fact the real cause of the misunderstanding. "Oh!" said he, "those I care for will soon find another to take my place. Soon; quotha. They have not waited till I was gone for that."

"Ah, indeed!" said Catherine, with some surprise: then, like the quick-witted girl she was, "so this is what all the coil is about." She then, with a charming smile, begged him to inform her who was his destined successor in her esteem. Griffith coloured purple at her cool hypocrisy (for such he considered it), and replied, almost fiercely, "who but that young black-a-vised George Neville, that you have been coquetting with this month past; and danced all night with him at Lady Munster's ball, you did."

Catherine blushed, and said deprecatingly, "*You* were not there, Griffith; or to be sure I had not danced with *him*."

"And he toasts you by name wherever he goes."

"Can I help that? Wait till I toast him before you make yourself ridiculous, and me very angry—about nothing."

Griffith, sticking to his one idea, replied doggedly, "Mistress Alice Peyton shilly-shallied with her true lover for years—till Richard Hilton came that was not fit to tie his shoes, and then——." Catherine cut him short: "Affront me, if nothing less will serve; but spare my sister in her grave." She began this sentence angrily, but concluded it in a broken voice. Griffith was half disarmed; but only half. He answered sullenly, "She did not die till she had jilted an honest gentleman and broken his heart, and married a sot, to her cost. And you are of her breed, when all is done; and now that young coxcomb has come, like Dick Hilton, between you and me."

"But I do not encourage him."

"You do not *discourage* him," retorted Griffith,

“or he would not be so hot after you. Were you ever the woman to say, ‘I have a servant already that loves me dear?’—That one frank word had sent him packing.”

Miss Peyton coloured, and the water came into her eyes. “I may have been imprudent,” she murmured. “The young gentleman made me smile with his extravagance. I never thought to be misunderstood by him, far less by you.” Then, suddenly, bold as brass, “’Tis all' your fault; if he had the power to make you uneasy, why did you not check me before?”

“Ay, forsooth! and have it cast in my teeth I was a jealous monster, and played the tyrant before my time. A poor fellow scarce knows what to be at, that loves a coquette.”

“Coquette I am none,” replied the lady, bridling magnificently.

Griffith took no notice of this interruption. He proceeded to say that he had hitherto endured

this intrusion of a rival in silence, though with a sore heart, hoping his patience might touch her, or the fire go out of itself. But at last, unable to bear it any longer in silence, he had shown his wound to one he knew could feel for him, his poor friend Pitt. Pitt, had then, let him know that his own mistake had been over-confidence in Alice Peyton's constancy. "He said to me, 'Watch your Kate close, and, at the first blush of a rival, say you to her, part with him, or part with me.'"

Catherine pinned him directly. "And this is how you take Joshua Pitt's advice ; by offering to run away from this sorry rival."

The shrewd reply, and a curl of the lip, half arch, half contemptuous, that accompanied the thrust, staggered the less ready Griffith. He got puzzled, and showed it.

"Well, but," stammered he at last, "your spirit is high ; I was mostly afeard to put it so

plump to you. So I thought I would go about a bit. However, it comes to the same thing; for this I do know, that if you refuse me your hand this day, it is to give it to a new acquaintance, as your Alice did before you. And, if it is to be so, 'tis best for me to be gone; best for *him*, and best for you. You don't know me, Kate, for as clever as you are. At the thought of your playing me false, after all these years, and marrying that George Neville, my heart turns to ice, and then to fire, and my head seems ready to burst, and my hands to do mad and bloody acts. Ay, I feel I should kill him, or you, or both, at the church porch. Ah!" He suddenly griped her arm, and at the same time involuntarily checked his mare.

Both horses stopped.

She raised her head with an inquiring look, and saw her lover's face discoloured with passion, and so strangely convulsed, that she feared at first he was in a fit, or stricken with death or palsy.



She uttered a cry of alarm, and stretched forth her hand towards him.

But the next moment she drew it back from him ; for, following his eye, she discerned the cause of this ghastly look. Her father's house stood at the end of the avenue they had just entered ; but there was another approach to it, viz., by a bridle-road at right angles to the avenue or main entrance ; and up that bridle-road a gentleman was walking his horse, and bade fair to meet them at the hall door.

It was young Neville. There was no mistaking his piebald charger for any other animal in that county.

Kate Peyton glanced from lover to lover, and shuddered at Griffith. She was familiar with petty jealousy ; she had even detected it pinching or colouring many a pretty face that tried very hard to hide it all the time. But that was nothing

to what she saw now. Hitherto she had but beheld the feeling of jealousy, but now she witnessed the livid passion of jealousy writhing in every lineament of a human face. That terrible passion had transfigured its victim in a moment: the ruddy, genial, kindly Griffith, with his soft brown eye, was gone; and in his place lowered a face, older, and discoloured, and convulsed, and almost demoniacal.

Women (wiser perhaps in this than men) take their strongest impressions by the eye, not ear. Catherine, I say, looked at him she had hitherto thought she knew; looked and feared him. And, even while she looked, and shuddered, Griffith spurred his mare sharply, and then drew her head across the grey gelding's path. It was an instinctive impulse to bar the lady he loved from taking another step towards the place where his rival awaited her. "I cannot bear it," he gasped. "Choose you now once for all between that puppy

there and me," and he pointed with his riding-whip at his rival, and waited with his teeth clenched for her decision.

The movement was rapid, the gesture large and commanding, and the words manly ; for what says the fighting poet?—

“He either fears his fate too much,  
Or his deserts are small ;  
Who fears to put it to the touch,  
To win or lose it all.”

## CHAPTER II.

MISS PEYTON drew herself up, and back, by one motion, like a queen at bay; but still she eyed him with a certain respect, and was careful now not to provoke nor pain him needlessly.

“I prefer *you*—though you speak harshly to me, sir,” said she, with gentle dignity.

“Then give me your hand with that man in sight, and end my torments: promise to marry me this very week. Ah, Kate! have pity on your poor faithful servant who has loved you so long.”

“I do, Griffith, I do,” said she sweetly; “but I shall never marry now. Only set your mind at rest about Mr. Neville there. He has never asked me, for one thing.”

“He soon will then.”

“No, no ; I declare I will be very cool to him after what you have said to me. But I cannot marry you neither. I dare not. Listen to me, and do pray govern your temper as I am doing mine. I have often read of men with a passion for jealousy—I mean men whose jealousy feeds upon air, and defies reason. I know you now for such a man. Marriage would not cure this madness, for wives do not escape admiration any more than maids. Something tells me you would be jealous of every fool that paid me some stale compliment, jealous of my female friends, and jealous of my relations, and perhaps jealous of your own children, and of that holy persecuted church which must still have a large share of *my* heart. No, no ; your face and your words have shown me a precipice. I tremble, and draw back, and now I never *will* marry at all ; from this day I give myself to the church.”

Griffith did not believe one word of all this. "That is your answer to me," said he bitterly. "When the right man puts the question (and he is not far off) you will tell another tale. You take me for a fool, and you mock me: you are not the lass to die an old maid, and men are not the fools to let you. With faces like yours the new servant comes before the first one is gone. Well, I have got my answer. County Cumberland, you are no place for me. The ways and the fields we two have rid together, oh how could I bear their sight without my dear? Why what a poor-spirited fool am I to stay and whine! Come, mistress, your lover waits you there, and your discarded servant knows good breeding: he leaves the country not to spoil your sport."

Catherine panted heavily. "Well, sir," said she, "then it is your doing, not mine. Will you not even shake hands with me, Griffith?"

"I were a brute else," sighed the jealous one,

with a sudden revulsion of feeling. "I have spent the happiest hours of my life beside you. If I loved thee less I had never left thee."

He clung a little while to her hand, more like a drowning man than anything else; then let it go, and suddenly shook his clenched fist in the direction of George Neville, and cried out with a savage yell, "My curse on him that parts us twain! And you, Kate, may God bless you single, and curse you married: and that is my last word in Cumberland."

"Amen," said Catherine resignedly.

And even with this they wheeled their horses apart, and rode away from each other: she very pale, but erect with wounded pride; he reeling in his saddle like a drunken man.

And so Griffith Gaunt, stung mad by jealousy, affronted his sweetheart, the proudest girl in Cumberland, and, yielding to his foible, fled from his pain.

Our foibles are our manias.

## CHAPTER III.

MISS PEYTON was shocked, and grieved at bottom, but she was also affronted and wounded. Now anger seems to have some fine buoyant quality, which makes it rise and come uppermost in an agitated mind. She rode proudly into the courtyard of her father's house, and would not look once behind to see the last of her perverse lover.

The old groom, Joe, who had taught her to ride when she was six years old, saw her coming, and hobbled out to hold her horse, while she alighted. "Mistress Kate," said he, "have you seen Master Griffith Gaunt anywheres?"

The young lady coloured at this question. "Why?" said she.



“Why?” repeated old Joe, a little contemptuously. “Why, where have *you* been not to know the country is out after un?” First comed Jock Denmet, with his horse all in a lather, to say old Mr. Charlton was took ill, and had asked for Master Griffith. I told him to go to Dogmere Copse: ‘our Kate is a hunting, to-day,’ says I, ‘and your Griffith he is sure not to be far from her gelding’s tail:’ a sticks in his spurs and away a goes: what, han’t you seen Jock neither?”

“No, no,” replied Miss Peyton, impatiently: “what, is there anything the matter?”

“The matter, quo she! Why Jock had’nt been gone an hour when in rides the new footman all in a lather, and brings a letter for Master Griffith from the old gentleman’s housekeeper: ‘you leave the letter with me, in case,’ says I, and I sends him a field after t’other. Here be the letter.”

He took off his cap and produced the letter.

Catherine started at the sight of it. "Alas!" said she, "this is a heavy day. Look, Joe; sealed with black; poor cousin Charlton! I doubt he is no more."

Joe shook his head expressively, and told her the butcher had come from that part not ten minutes ago, with word that the blinds were all down at Bolton Hall.

Poor human nature! a gleam of joy shot through Catherine's heart; this sad news would compel Griffith to stay at home and bury his benefactor; and that delay would give him time to reflect; and somehow or other she felt sure it would end in his not going at all.

But these thoughts had no sooner passed through her than she was ashamed of them and of herself. What, welcome that poor old man's death because it would keep her cross-grained lover at home? Her cheeks burned with shame, and with a superfluous exercise of self-defence she retired from Old

Joe, lest he should divine what was passing in her mind.

But she was so rapt in thought that she carried the letter away with her unconsciously.

As she passed through the hall she heard George Neville and her father in animated conversation. She mounted the stairs softly, and went into a little boudoir of her own on the first floor, and sat down. The house stood high, and there was a very expansive and beautiful view of the country from this window. She sat down by it and drooped, and looked wistfully through the window, and thought of the past, and fell into a sad reverie. Pity began to soften her pride and anger, and presently two gentle tears dimmed her glorious eyes a moment, and then stole down her delicate cheeks.

While she sat thus lost in the past, jovial voices and creaking boots broke suddenly upon her ear, and came up the stairs : they jarred upon her ; so

she cast one last glance out of the window, and rose to get out of their way if possible: but it was too late; a heavy step came to the door, and a ruddy port-drinking face peeped in. It was her father. "See-ho!" roared the jovial Squire. "I've found the hare on her form: bide thou outside a moment." And he entered the room; but he had no sooner closed the door than his whole manner changed from loud and jovial to agitated and subdued. "Kate, my girl," said he, piteously, "I have been a bad father to thee. I have spent all the money that should have been thine; thy poor father can scarce look thee in the face. So now I bring thee a good husband: be a good child now, and a dutiful. Neville's Court is his, and Neville's Cross will be, by the entail; and so will the baronetcy. I shall see my girl Lady Neville."

"Never, papa, never," cried Kate.

"Hush! hush!" said the Squire, and put up his

hand to her in great agitation and alarm : “ hush ! or he will hear ye. Kate,” he whispered, “ are you mad ? Little I thought, when he asked to see me, it was to offer marriage. Be a good girl now : don’t you quarrel with good luck. You are not fit to be poor, and you have made enemies. Do but think how they will flout you when I die, and Bill’s jade of a wife puts you to the door, as she will : and now you can triumph over them all ; my Lady Neville ; and make your poor father happy ; my Lady Neville. Enough said, for I have promised you ; so don’t go and make a fool of me and yourself into the bargain. And—and—a word in your ear ; he has lent me a hundred pounds.”

At this climax the father hung his head ; the daughter winced and moaned out, “ Papa ! how *could* you ? ”

Mr. Peyton had gradually descended to that intermediate stage of degradation, when the sub-

stance of dignity is all gone, but its shadow, shame, remains. He stamped impatiently on the ground, and cut his humiliation short by rushing out of the room. "Here, try your own luck, youngster," he cried at the door. "She knows my mind." He trampled down the stairs, and young George Neville knocked respectfully at the door, though it was half open; and came in with youth's light foot, and a handsome face flushed into beauty by love and hope.

Miss Peyton's eye just swept him, as he entered, and with the same movement she turned away her fair head and blushing cheek towards the window; yet, must I own it, she quietly moulded the letter that lay in her lap, so that the address was no longer visible to the new-comer.

Small secresy, verging on deceit, you are bred in women's bones.

This blushing and averted cheek is one of those equivocal receptions that have puzzled many a

sensible man. It is a sign of coy love ; it is a sign of gentle aversion ; *our* mode of interpreting it is simple and judicious ; whichever it happens to be we go and take it for the other.

The brisk bold wooer that now engaged Kate Peyton was not the man to be dashed by a woman's coyness. Handsome, daring, good-humoured, and vain, he had everything in his favour but his novelty.

Look at Kate ! her eye lingers wistfully on that disconsolate horseman whose every step takes him farther from her ; but George has her ear, and draws closer and closer to it, and pours love's mellow murmurs into it.

He told her he had made the grand tour, and seen the beauties of every land, but none like her ; other ladies had certainly pleased his eye for a moment, but she alone had conquered his heart. He said many charming things to her,

such as Griffith Gaunt had never said. Amongst the rest, he assured her the beauty of her person would not alone have fascinated him so deeply ; but he had seen the beauty of her mind in those eyes of hers that seemed not eyes, but souls ; and, begging her pardon for his presumption, he aspired to wed her mind.

Such ideas had often risen in Kate's own mind ; but to hear them from a man was new. She looked askant through the window at the lessening Griffith, and thought "how the grand tour improves a man !" and said as coldly as she could, "I esteem you, sir, and cannot but be flattered by sentiments so superior to those I am used to hear ; but let this go no further. I shall never marry now."

Instead of being angry at this, or telling her she wanted to marry somebody else, as the injudicious Griffith had done, young Neville had the address to treat it as an excellent jest, and



drew such comical pictures of all the old maids in the neighbourhood, that she could not help smiling.

But the moment she smiled, the inflammable George made hot love to her again. Then she besought him to leave her, piteously. Then he said cheerfully he would leave her as soon as ever she had promised to be his. At that she turned sullen and haughty, and looked through the window and took no notice of him whatever. Then, instead of being discouraged or mortified, he showed imperturbable confidence and good humour, and begged archly to know what interesting object was in sight from that window. On this she blushed and withdrew her eyes from the window, and so they met his. On that he threw himself on his knees (custom of the day), and wooed her with such a burst of passionate and tearful eloquence that she began to pity him, and said she, lifting her lovely eyes, "Alas! I was

born to make all those I esteem, unhappy ;” and she sighed deeply.

“Not a bit of it,” said he ; “you were born, like the sun, to bless all you shine upon. Sweet Mistress Kate, I love you as these country boors can never be taught to love. I lay my heart, my name, my substance, at your feet ; you shall not be loved—you shall be worshipped. Ah ! turn those eyes, brimful of soul, on me again, and let me try and read in them that one day, no matter how distant, the delight of my eyes, the joy of all my senses, the pride of Cumberland, the pearl of England, the flower of womankind, the rival of the angels, the darling of George Neville’s heart, will be George Neville’s wife.”

Fire and water were in his eyes, passion in every tone ; his manly hand grasped hers and trembled, and drew her gently towards him.

Her bosom heaved ; his passionate male voice and manner electrified her, and made her flutter.

"Spare me this pain," she faltered; and she looked through the window and thought, "Poor Griffith was right after all, and I was wrong. He had cause for jealousy, and CAUSE FOR FEAR."

And then she pitied him who panted at her side, and then was sorry for him who rode away disconsolate, still lessening to her eye; and what with this conflict, and the emotion her quarrel with Griffith had already caused her, she leaned her head back against the shutter, and began to sob low, but almost hysterically.

Now, Mr. George Neville was neither a fool nor a novice. If he had never been downright in love before (which I crave permission to doubt), he had gone far enough on that road to make one Italian lady, two French, one Austrian, and one Creole in love with him; and each of these love affairs had given him fresh insight into the ways of women. Enlightened by so many bitter-sweet experiences, he saw at once that there was something more

going on inside Kate's heaving bosom than he could have caused by offering her his hand. He rose from his knees, and leaned against the opposite shutter, and fixed his eyes a little sadly, but very observantly, on her, as she leaned back against the shutter, sobbing low, but hysterically, and quivering all over.

"There's some other man at the bottom of this," thought George Neville.

"Mistress Kate," said he, gently, "I do not come here to make you weep. I love you like a gentleman; if you love another, take courage, tell me so, and don't let your father constrain your inclinations. Dearly as I love you, I would not wed your person and your heart another's; that would be too cruel to you, and (drawing himself up with sudden majesty) too unjust to myself."

Kate looked up at him through her tears, and admired this man, who could love ardently, yet be proud and just. And if his appeal to her

candour had been made yesterday, she would have said frankly, "There is one I—esteem." But, since the quarrel, she would not own to herself, far less to another, that she loved a man who had turned his back upon her. So she *parried*.

"There is no one I love enough to wed," said she. "I am a cold-hearted girl, born to give pain to my betters. But I shall do something desperate to end all this."

"All what?" said he, keenly.

"The whole thing; my unprofitable life."

"Mistress Kate," said Neville, "I asked you—was there another man. If you had answered me 'In truth there is, but he is poor and my father is averse,' or the like; then I would have stood his friend, for your sake. But you say there is no man you love. Then I say you shall be Dame Neville."

"What, whether I will or no?"

“Yes; whether you *think* you will or no.”

Catherine turned her dreamy eyes on him.

“You have had a good master. Why did you not come to me sooner?”

She was thinking more of him than of herself, and in fact paying too little heed to her words. But she had no sooner uttered this inadvertent speech than she felt she had said too much; she blushed a rosy red, and hid her face in her hands in the most charming confusion.

“Sweetest, it is not an hour too late, as you do not love another,” was stout George Neville’s reply.

But nevertheless the cunning rogue thought it safest to temporize, and put his coy mistress off her guard. So he ceased to alarm her by pressing the question of marriage, but seduced her into a charming talk, where the topics were not so personal, and only the tones of his voice and the glances of his expressive eyes were caressing. He was on his mettle to please her by hook or by

crook, and was delightful, irresistible. He set her at ease, and she began to listen more, and even to smile faintly, and to look through the window a little less perseveringly.

Suddenly the spell was broken for a while.

And by whom?

By the other.

Ay you may well stare. It sounds strange, but it is true, that the poor forlorn horseman, hanging like a broken man, as he was, over his tired horse, and wending his solitary way from her he loved, and resigning the field, like a goose, to the very rival he feared, did yet (like the retiring Parthian) shoot an arrow right into that pretty boudoir, and hit both his sweetheart and his rival; hit them hard enough to spoil their sport, and make a little mischief between them—for that afternoon, at all events.

The arrow came into the room after this fashion.

Kate was sitting in a very feminine attitude.

When a man wants to look in any direction, he turns his body and his eye the same way and does it; but women love to cast oblique regards, and this their instinct is a fruitful source of their graceful and characteristic postures.

Kate Peyton was at this moment a statue of her sex. Her fair head leaned gently back against the corner of the window shutter, her pretty feet and fair person in general were opposite George Neville, who sat facing the window but in the middle of the room; her arms, half pendent, half extended, went listlessly aslant her and somewhat to the right of her knees, yet by an exquisite turn of the neck her grey eyes contrived to be looking dreamily out of the window to her left. Still, in this figure, that pointed one way and looked another, there was no distortion; all was easy, and full of that subtle grace we artists call *Repose*.

But suddenly she dissolved this feminine attitude, rose to her feet, and interrupted her wooer civilly.



"Excuse me," said she, "but can you tell me which way that road on the hill leads to?"

Her companion stared a little at so sudden a turn in the conversation, but replied by asking her with perfect good humour what road she meant.

"The one that gentleman on horseback has just taken. Surely," she continued, "that road does not take to Bolton Hall."

"Certainly not," said George, following the direction of her finger, "Bolton lies to the right. That road takes to the sea-coast by Otterbury and Stanhope."

"I thought so," said Kate. "How unfortunate! He cannot know. But indeed how should he?"

"Who cannot know? and what? you speak in riddles, mistress; and how pale you are; are you ill?"

"No, not ill, sir," faltered Kate; "but you see me much discomposed. My cousin Charlton died

this day ; and the news met me at the very door."

She could say no more.

Mr. Neville, on hearing this news, began to make many excuses for having inadvertently intruded himself upon her on such a day ; but in the midst of his apologies she suddenly looked him full in the face, and said, with nervous abruptness, "You *talk* like a *preux chevalier* ; I wonder whether you would ride five or six miles to do me a service ?"

"Ay ; a thousand ;" said the young man, glowing with pleasure. "What is to do?"

Kate pointed through the window. "You see that gentleman on horseback. Well, I happen to know he is leaving the country : he thinks that he—that I—that Mr. Charlton has many years to live. He must be told Mr. Charlton is dead, and his presence is required at Bolton Hall. I *should* like somebody to gallop after him, and give him this letter : but my own horse is tired, and I am

tired—and, to be frank, there is a little coolness between the gentleman himself and me ; oh, I wish him no ill, but really I am not upon terms—I do not feel complaisant enough to carry a letter after him ; yet I do feel that he *must* have it : do not *you* think it would be malicious and unworthy in me to keep the news from him, when I know it is so ?”

Young Neville smiled. “Nay, mistress, why so many words? Give me your letter, and I will soon overtake the gentleman : he seems in no great hurry.”

Kate thanked him, and made a polite apology for giving him so much trouble, and handed him the letter : when it came to that, she held it out to him rather irresolutely ; but he took it promptly and bowed low after the fashion of the day ; she curtsied ; he marched off with alacrity ; she sat down again and put her head in her hand to think it all over, and a chill thought ran through her ;

was her conduct wise? What would Griffith think at her employing his rival? Would he not infer Neville had entered her service in more senses than one? Perhaps he would throw the letter down in a rage and never read it.

Steps came rapidly, the door opened, and there was George Neville again, but not the same George Neville that went out but thirty seconds before. He stood at the door looking very black, and with a sardonic smile on his lips. "An excellent jest, mistress," said he, ironically.

"Why what is the matter?" said the lady, stoutly: but her red cheeks belied her assumption of innocence.

"Oh not much," said George, with a bitter sneer. "It is an old story; only I thought you were nobler than the rest of your sex. This letter is to Mr. Griffith Gaunt."

"Well, sir," said Kate, with a face of serene and candid innocence.

“And Mr. Griffith Gaunt is a suitor of yours.”

“Say, *was*. He is so no longer. He and I are out. But for that, think you I had even listened to—what you have been saying to me this ever so long?”

“Oh, that alters the case,” said George. “But stay!” and he knitted his brows and reflected. Up to a moment ago the loftiness of Catherine Peyton’s demeanour, and the celestial something in her soul-like dreamy eyes, had convinced him she was a creature free from the small dishonesty and duplicity he had noted in so many women otherwise amiable and good.

But this business of the letter had shaken the illusion.

“Stay,” said he stiffly. “You say Mr. Gaunt and you are out.”

Catherine assented by a movement of her fair head.

“And he is leaving the country. Perhaps

this letter is to keep him from leaving the country?"

"Only until he has buried his benefactor," murmured Kate, in deprecating accents.

George wore a bitter sneer at this. "Mistress Kate," said he, after a significant pause, "do you read Molière?"

She bridled a little, and would not reply; she knew Molière quite well enough not to want his wit levelled at her head.

"Do you admire the character of Celimene?"

No reply.

"You do not. How can you? She was too much your inferior. She never sent one of her lovers with a letter to the other to stop his flight. Well, you may eclipse Celimene; but permit me to remind you that I am George Neville, and not Georges Dandin."

Miss Peyton rose from her seat with eyes that literally flashed fire, and, the horrible truth must be

told, her first wild impulse was to reply to all this Molière with one cut of her little riding-whip : but she had a swift mind, and two reflections entered it together : first that this would be unlike a gentlewoman ; secondly, that if she whipped Mr. Neville, however slightly, he would not lend her his piebald horse : so she took stronger measures ; she just sank down again and faltered, “ I do not understand these bitter words : I have no lover at all : I never will have one again. But it is hard to think I cannot make a friend, nor keep a friend.” And so lifted up her hands and began to cry piteously.

Then the stout George was taken aback, and made to think himself a ruffian.

“ Nay, do not weep so, Mistress Kate,” said he hurriedly. “ Come, take courage. I am not jealous of Mr. Gaunt ; a man that hath been two years dangling after you, and could not win you. I look but to my own self-respect in the matter. I know

your sex better than you know yourselves : were I to carry that letter you would thank me now, but by and by despise me ; now as I mean you to be my wife, I will not risk your contempt. Why not take my horse, put who you like on him, and so convey the letter to Mr. Gaunt ?”

Now this was all the fair mourner wanted ; so she said, “ No, no, she would not be beholden to him for anything ; he had spoken harshly to her, and misjudged her cruelly, cruelly : oh ! oh ! oh !”

Then he implored her to grant him this small favour : then she cleared up and said, well, sooner than bear malice, she would. He thanked her for granting him that favour. She went off with the letter, saying, “ I will be back anon.” But, once she got clear, she opened the door again, and peeped in at him gaily, and said she, “ Why not ask me who *wrote* the letter before you compared me to that French coquette ?” And with this made him an arch curtsy, and tripped away.



Mr. George Neville opened his eyes with astonishment. This arch question, and Kate's manner of putting it, convinced him the obnoxious missive was not a love-letter at all. He was sorry now, and vexed with himself for having called her a coquette, and made her cry. After all, what was the mighty favour she had asked of him? to carry a sealed letter from somebody or other to a person who, to be sure, had been her lover, but was so no longer. A simple act of charity and civility, and he had refused it in injurious terms.

He was glad he had lent his horse, and almost sorry he had not taken the letter himself.

To these chivalrous self-reproaches succeeded an uneasy feeling that perhaps the lady might retaliate somehow. It struck him, on reflection, that the arch query she had let fly at him was accompanied with a certain sparkle of the laughing eye, such as ere now had, in his experience, preceded a stroke of the feminine claw.

As he walked up and down, uneasy, awaiting the fair one's return, her father came up, and asked him to dine and sleep. What made the invitation more welcome was that it in reality came from Kate. "She tells me she has borrowed your horse," said the Squire, "so says she, I am bound to take care of you till daylight, and indeed our ways are perilous at night."

"She is an angel!" cried the lover, all his ardour revived by this unexpected trait; "my horse, my house, my hand, and my heart, are all at her service by night and day."

Mr. Peyton, to wile away the time before dinner, invited him to walk out and see—a hog: deadly fat, as times went. But Neville denied himself that satisfaction on the plea that he had his orders to await Miss Peyton's return where he was. The Squire was amused at his excessive docility, and winked, as much as to say, "I have been once upon a time in your

plight ;” and so went and gloried in his hog alone.

The lover fell into a delicious reverie. He enjoyed by anticipation the novel pleasure of an evening passed all alone with this charming girl. The father, being friendly to his suit, would go to sleep after dinner ; and then by the subdued light of a wood-fire he would murmur his love into that sweet ear for hours, until the averted head should come round by degrees, and the delicious lips yield a coy assent. He resolved the night should not close till he had surprised, overpowered, and secured his lovely bride.

These soft meditations reconciled him for awhile to the prolonged absence of their object.

In the midst of them he happened to glance through the window ; and he saw a sight that took his very breath away, and rooted him in amazement to the spot. About a mile from the house a lady in a scarlet habit was galloping across

country as the crow flies. Hedge, ditch, or brook, nothing stopped her an instant; and as for the pace,

She seemed in running to devour the way.

It was Kate Peyton on his piebald horse.

## CHAPTER IV.

GRIFFITH GAUNT, unknown to himself, had lost temper as well as heart before he took the desperate step of leaving the country. Now his temper was naturally good; and, ere he had ridden two miles, he recovered it. To his cost: for the sustaining force of anger being gone, he was alone with his grief. He drew the rein half mechanically, and from a spirited canter declined to a walk.

And the slower he went the chillier grew his heart, till it lay half ice, half lead, in his bosom.

Parted! oh word pregnant with misery.

Never to see those heavenly eyes again nor

hear that silvery voice! Never again to watch that peerless form walk the minuet; nor see it lift the grey horse over a fence with the grace and spirit that seemed inseparable from it!

Desolation streamed over him at the thought. And next his forlorn mind began to cling even to the inanimate objects that were dotted about the place which held her. He passed a little farmhouse into which Kate and he had once been driven by a storm, and had sat together by the kitchen fire; and the farmer's wife had smiled on them for sweethearts, and made them drink rum and milk, and stay till the sun was fairly out. "Ah! good-bye, little farm," he sighed, "when shall I ever see you again?"

He passed a brook where they had often stopped together and given their panting horses just a mouthful after a run with the harriers. "Good-bye, little brook!" said he: "you will ripple on as before, and warble as you go; but I shall never

drink at your water more, nor hear your pleasant murmur with her I love."

He sighed and crept away, still making for the sea.

In the icy depression of his heart, his body and his senses were half paralysed, and none would have known the accomplished huntsman in this broken man, who hung anyhow over his mare's neck, and went to and fro in the saddle.

When he had gone about five miles, he came to the crest of a hill; he remembered that, once past that brow, he could see Peyton Hall no more. He turned slowly and cast a sorrowful look at it.

It was winter, but the afternoon sun had come out bright. The horizontal beams struck full upon the house, and all the western panes shone like burnished gold; her very abode, how glorious it looked! And he was to see it no more.

He gazed, and gazed at the bright house till love and sorrow dimmed his eyes, and he could

see the beloved place no more. Then his dogged will prevailed, and carried him away towards the sea, but crying like a woman now, and hanging all dislocated over his horse's mane.

Now about a mile farther on, as he crept along on a vile and narrow road, all woe-begone and broken, he heard a mighty scurry of horse's feet in the field to his left; he looked languidly up; and the first thing he saw was a great piebald horse's head and neck in the act of rising in the air, and doubling his fore-legs under him, to leap the low hedge a yard or two in front of him.

He did leap, and landed just in front of Griffith; his rider curbed him so keenly that he went back almost on his haunches, and then stood motionless all across the road, with quivering tail. A lady in a scarlet riding-habit and purple cap, sat him as if he had been a throne instead of a horse, and, without moving her body, turned her head swift as



a snake, and fixed her great grey eyes full and searching on Griffith Gaunt.

He uttered a little shout of joy and amazement, his mare reared and plunged, and then was quiet. And thus Kate Peyton and he met—at right angles—and so close that it looked as if she had meant to ride him down.

How he stared at her! how more than mortal fair she shone, returning to those bereaved eyes of his, as if she had really dropped from Heaven.

His clasped hands, his haggard face channelled by tears, showed the keen girl she was strong where she had thought herself weak, and she comported herself accordingly, and in one moment took a much higher tone than she had intended as she came along.

“I am afraid,” said she, very coldly, “you will have to postpone your journey a day or two. I am grieved to tell you that poor Mr. Charlton is dead.”

Griffith uttered an exclamation.

“He asked for you: and messengers are out after you on every side. You must go to Bolton at once.”

“Well a day!” said Griffith, “has he left me too? good kind old man, on any other day I had found tears for thee. But now methinks happy are the dead. Alas! sweet mistress, I hoped you came to tell me you had—I might—what signifies what I hoped—when I saw you had deigned to ride after me. Why should I go to Bolton after all?”

“Because you will be an ungrateful wretch else. What, leave others to carry your kinsman and your benefactor to his grave; while you turn your back on him—and inherit his estate?—For shame, sir! for shame!”

Griffith expostulated humbly. “How hardly you judge me. What are Bolton Hall and Park to me now? They were to have been yours, you

know. And yours they shall be. I came between and robbed you. To be sure the old man knew my mind: he said to himself, 'Griffith or Kate, what matters it who has the land? they will live together on it. But all that is changed now; you will never share it with me; and so I do feel I have no right to the place. Kate, my own Kate, I have heard them sneer at you for being poor, and it made my heart ache. I'll stop that anyway. Go you in my place to the funeral; he that is dead will forgive me; his spirit knows now what I endure: and I'll send you a writing, all sealed and signed, shall make Bolton Hall and Park yours: and, when you are happy with some one you *can* love, as well as I love you, think sometimes of poor jealous Griffith, that loved you dear and grudged you nothing; but," grinding his teeth and turning white, "I *can't* live in Cumberland, and see you in another man's arms."

Then Catherine trembled, and could not speak

awhile: but at last she faltered out, "You will make me *hate* you."

"God forbid!" said simple Griffith.

"Well then don't thwart me, and provoke me so, but just turn your horse's head and go quietly home to Bolton Hall, and do your duty to the dead and the living. You can't go *this* way for me and my horse:" then, seeing him waver, this virago faltered out, "and I have been so tried to-day first by one, then by another, surely *you* might have some pity on me. Oh! oh! oh! oh!"

"Nay, nay," cried Griffith, all in a flutter: "I'll go without more words: as I am a gentleman I will sleep at Bolton this night, and will do my duty to the dead and the living. Don't you cry, sweetest: I give in. I find I have no will but yours."

The next moment they were cantering side by side, and never drew rein till they reached the cross roads.

"Now tell me one thing," stammered Griffith, with a most ghastly attempt at cheerful indifference. "How—do you—happen to be—on George Neville's horse?"

Kate had been expecting this question for some time: yet she coloured high when it did come. However, she had her answer pat. The horse was in the stable-yard, and fresh: her own was tired. "What was I to do, Griffith? And now," added she, hastily, "the sun will soon set, and the roads are bad: be careful. I wish I could ask you to sleep at our house: but—there are reasons—" she hesitated; she could not well tell him George Neville was to dine and sleep there.

Griffith assured here there was no danger; his mare knew every foot of the way.

They parted; Griffith rode to Bolton; and Kate rode home.

It was past dinner-time. She ran upstairs, and hurried on her best gown and her diamond comb.

For she began to quake now at the prank she had played with her guest's horse: and Nature taught her that the best way to soften censure is—to be beautiful.

— on pardonne tout aux belles.

And certainly she was passing fair; and queenly with her diamond comb.

She came down-stairs, and was received by her father; he grumbled at being kept waiting for dinner.

Kate easily appeased the good-natured Squire, and then asked what had become of Mr. Neville.

“Oh, he is gone long ago: remembered, all of a sudden, he had promised to dine with a neighbour.”

Kate shook her head sceptically, but said nothing. But a good minute after, she inquired, “How did he go? on foot?”

The Squire did not know.

After dinner old Joe sought an interview, and was admitted into the dining-room :

“Be it all right about the grey horse, Master?”

“What of him?” asked Kate.

“He be gone to Neville Court, Mistress. But I suppose (with a horrid leer) it is all right. Muster Neville told me all about it. He said, says he, ‘Some do break a kine or the likes on these here jyful occasions; other some do exchange goold rings. Your young Mistress and me, *we* exchange nags. She takes my pieball; I take her grey;’ says he. ‘Saddle him for me, Joe,’ says he, ‘and wish me jy.’ So I clapped Muster Neville’s saddle on the grey, and a gave me a goolden guinea a did, and I was so struck of a heap I let un go without wishing on him jy; but I hollered it arter un, as hard as I could. How you looks! It be all right, baint it?”

Squire Peyton laughed heartily, and said he concluded it was all right: “The piebald,” said he,

“is rising five, and *I’ve* had the grey ten years. We have got the sunny side of that bargain, Joe.” He gave Joe a glass of wine and sent him off, inflated with having done a good stroke in horseflesh.

As for Kate she was red as fire, and kept her lips close as wax ; not a word could be got out of her. The less she said the more she thought. She was thoroughly vexed, and sore perplexed how to get her grey horse back from such a man as George Neville ; and yet she could not help laughing at the trick, and secretly admiring this chevalier, who had kept his mortification to himself, and parried an affront so gallantly.

“The good-humoured wretch !” said she to herself. “If Griffith ever goes away again, he will have me, whether I like or no. No lady could resist the monster long, without some other man at hand to help her.’



## CHAPTER V.

As, when a camel drops in the desert, vultures, hitherto unseen, come flying from the horizon, so Mr. Charlton had no sooner succumbed, than the air darkened with undertakers flocking to Bolton for a lugubrious job. They rode up on black steeds, they crunched the gravel in grave gigs, and sent in black-edged cards to Griffith, and lowered their voices, and bridled their briskness, and tried hard, poor souls, to be sad: and were horribly complacent beneath that thin japan of venal sympathy.

Griffith selected his Raven, and then sat down to issue numerous invitations.

The idea of eschewing funereal pomp had not yet arisen. A gentleman of that day liked his very remains to make a stir, and did not see the fun of stealing into his grave like a rabbit slipping aground. Mr. Charlton had even left behind him a sealed letter containing a list of the persons he wished to follow him to the grave, and attend the reading of his will. These were thirty-four; and amongst them three known to fame, viz.: George Neville, Esq., Edward Peyton, Esq., and Miss Catherine Peyton.

To all and each of the thirty-four, young Gaunt wrote a formal letter inviting them to pay respect to their deceased friend, and to honour himself by coming to Bolton Hall at nigh noon on Saturday next. These letters, in compliance with another custom of the time and place, were all sent by mounted messengers, and the answers came on horseback too: so there was much clattering of hoofs coming and going, and much roasting, bak-

ing, drinking of ale, and bustling ; all along of him who lay so still in an upper chamber.

And every man and woman came to Mr. Gaunt to ask his will and advice, however simple the matter : and the servants turned very obsequious, and laid themselves out to please the new master, and retain their old places.

And what with the sense of authority, and the occupation, and growing ambition, love-sick Griffith grew another man, and began to forget that two days ago he was leaving the country and going to give up the whole game.

He found time to send Kate a loving letter, but no talk of marriage in it. He remembered she had asked him to give her time. Well, he would take her advice.

It wanted just three days to the funeral, when Mr. Charlton's own carriage, long unused, was found to be out of repair. Griffith had it sent to

the nearest town, and followed it on that and other business. Now it happened to be what the country folk called "justicing day;" and who should ride into the yard of the "Roebuck" but the new magistrate, Mr. Neville; he alighted off a great bony grey horse before Griffith's very nose, and sauntered into a private room.

; Griffith looked, and looked, and, scarcely able to believe his senses, followed Neville's horse to the stable, and examined him all round.

. Griffith was sore perplexed; and stood at the stable door glaring at the horse; and sick misgivings troubled him. He forgot the business he came about, and went and hung about the bar, and tried to pick up a clue to this mystery. The poor wretch put on a miserable assumption of indifference, and asked one or two of the magistrates, if that was not Mr. Peyton's grey horse young Neville had ridden in upon.

. Now amongst these gentlemen was a young

squire Miss Peyton had refused, and galled him. He had long owed Gaunt a grudge for seeming to succeed where he had notably failed, and, now, hearing him talk so much about the grey, he smelt a rat. He stepped into the parlour and told Neville Gaunt was fuming about the grey horse, and questioning everybody. Neville, though he put so bold a face on his recent adventure at Peyton Hall, was secretly smarting, and quite disposed to sting Gaunt in return. He saw a tool in this treacherous young squire—his name was Galton—and used him accordingly.

Galton, thoroughly primed by Neville, slipped back and, choosing his opportunity, poisoned Griffith Gaunt.

And this is how he poisoned him. "Oh," said he, "Neville has bought the grey nag; and cost him dear, it did." Griffith gave a sigh of relief; for he at once concluded old Peyton had sold his daughter's very horse. He resolved to buy

her a better next week with Mr. Charlton's money.

But Galton, who was only playing with him, went on to explain that Neville had paid a double price for the nag; he had given Miss Peyton his piebald horse in exchange, and his troth into the bargain. In short, he lent the matter so adroit a turn, that the exchange of horses seemed to be Kate's act as much as Neville's, and the inference inevitable.

"It is a falsehood," gasped Griffith.

"Nay," said Galton, "I had it on the best authority: but you shall not quarrel with me about it; the lady is nought to me, and I but tell the tale as 'twas told to me."

"Then who told it you?" said Gaunt, sternly.

"Why it is all over the county, for that matter."

"No subterfuges, sir. I am the lady's servant, and you know it: this report, it slanders her, and

insults me: give me the author, or I'll lay my hunting whip on your bones."

"Two can play at that game," said Galton; but he turned pale at the prospect of the pastime.

Griffith strode towards him, black with ire.

Then Galton stammered out: "It was Neville himself told me."

"Ah!" said Griffith; "I thought so. He is a liar, and a coward."

"I would not advise you to tell *him* so," said the other, maliciously: "he has killed his man in France. Spitted him like a lark."

Griffith replied by a smile of contempt.

"Where is the man?" said he, after a pause.

"How should I know?" asked Galton, innocently.

"Where did you leave him five minutes ago?"

Galton was dumbfounded at this stroke; and could find nothing to say.

"And now, as often happens, the matter took a

turn not in the least anticipated by the conspirators. "You must come with me, sir, if you please," said Griffith, quietly: and he took Galton's arm.

"Oh, with all my heart," said the other; "but, Mr. Gaunt, do not you take these idle reports to heart. *I* never do. What the devil—where are you carrying me to? For Heaven's sake, let this foolish business go no farther."

For he found Griffith was taking him to the very room where Neville was.

Griffith deigned no reply: he just opened the door of the room in question, and walked the tale-bearer into the presence of the tale-maker. George Neville rose and confronted the pair with a vast appearance of civility; but under it a sneer was just discernible.

The rivals measured each other from head to foot, and then Neville inquired to what he owed the honour of this visit.

Griffith replied: "He tells me you told him



Miss Peyton has exchanged horses with you.”—  
“Oh! you indiscreet person,” said George, shaking his finger playfully at Galton.—“And, by the same token, has plighted her troth to you.”

“Worse and worse,” said George. “Galton, I’ll never trust you with any secrets again. Besides, you exaggerate.”

“Come, sir,” said Griffith, sternly: “this Ned Galton was but your tool, and your mouth-piece; and therefore I bring him here to witness my reply to *you*: Mr. George Neville, you are a liar and a scoundrel.”

George Neville bounded to his feet like a tiger. “I’ll have your life for those two words,” he cried.

Then he suddenly governed himself by a great effort: “It is not for me to bandy foul terms with a Cumberland savage,” said he. “Name your time and place.”

“I will. Ned Galton, you may go, I wish to say a few words in private to Mr. Neville.”

Galton hesitated. "No violence, gentlemen: consider."

"Nonsense," said Neville. "Mr. Gaunt and I are going to fight: we are not going to brawl. Be so good as to leave us."

"Ay," said Griffith: "and, if you repeat a word of all this, woe be to your skin."

As soon as he was gone, Griffith Gaunt turned very grave and calm, and said to George Neville, "The Cumberland savage has been better taught than to expose the lady he loves to gossiping tongues."

Neville coloured up to the eyes at this thrust.

Griffith continued, "The least you can do is to avoid fresh scandal."

"I shall be happy to co-operate with you so far," said Neville, stiffly. "I undertake to keep Galton silent: and for the rest, we have only to name an early hour for meeting, and confide it to but one discreet friend apiece who will attend us

to the field. Then there will be no gossip, and no bumpkins nor constables breaking in—such things have happened in this county, I hear.”

It was Wednesday. They settled to meet on Friday at noon on a hillside between Bolton and Neville's Court. The spot was exposed; but so wild and unfrequented that no interruption was to be feared. Mr. Neville being a practised swordsman, Gaunt chose pistols; a weapon at which the combatants were supposed to be pretty equal. To this Neville very handsomely consented.

By this time a stiff and elaborate civility had taken the place of their heat, and at parting they bowed both long and low to each other.

Griffith left the inn and went into the street. And, as soon as he got there, he began to realize what he had done, and that in a day or two he might very probably be a dead man. The first thing he did was to go with sorrowful face and heavy step to Mr. Houseman's office.

Mr. Houseman was a highly respectable solicitor. His late father and he had long enjoyed the confidence of the gentry, and this enabled him to avoid litigious business, and confine himself pretty much to the more agreeable and lucrative occupation of drawing wills, settlements, and conveyances; and effecting loans, sales, and transfers. He visited the landed proprietors, and dined with them, and was a great favourite in the county.

“Justicing day” brought him many visits; so on that day he was always at his place of business. Indeed a client was with him when Griffith called, and the young gentleman had to wait in the outer office for full ten minutes.

Then a door opened, and the client in question came out, looking mortified and anxious. It was Squire Peyton. At sight of Gaunt, who had risen to take his vacant place, Kate’s father gave him a stiff nod, and an unfriendly glance, then hurried away.

Griffith was hurt at his manner. He knew very well Mr. Peyton looked higher for his daughter than Griffith Gaunt: but for all that the old gentleman had never shown him any personal dislike or incivility until this moment.

So Griffith could not but fear that Neville was somehow at the bottom of this, and that the combination was very strong against him. Now in thus interpreting Mr. Peyton's manner, he fell into a very common error and fruitful cause of misunderstanding. We go and fancy that Everybody is thinking of *us*. But he is not: he is like us; he is thinking of himself.

"Well, well," thought Griffith, "if I am not to have her, what better place for me than the grave?"

He entered Mr. Houseman's private room and opened his business at once.

But a singular concurrence of circumstances

induced Lawyer Houseman to confide to a third party the substance of what passed between this young gentleman and himself. So, to avoid repetition, the best way will be to let Houseman tell this part of my tale instead of me: and I only hope his communication, when it comes, may be half as interesting to my reader as it was to his hearer.

Suffice it for me to say that lawyer and client were closeted a good hour; and were still conversing together, when a card was handed in to Mr. Houseman that seemed to cause him both surprise and pleasure. "In five minutes," said he to the clerk. Griffith took the hint, and bade him good-bye directly.

As he went out, the gentleman who had sent in his card rose from a seat in the outer office to go in.

It was Mr. George Neville.

Griffith Gaunt and he saluted and scanned each

other curiously. They little thought to meet again so soon. The clerks saw nothing more than two polite gentlemen passing each other.

The more Griffith thought of the approaching duel the less he liked it. He was an impulsive man for one thing; and, with such, a cold fit naturally succeeds a hot one. And, besides, as his heat abated, Reason and Reflection made themselves heard, and told him that in a contest with a formidable rival he was throwing away an advantage: after all, Kate had shown him great favour; she had ridden Neville's horse after him, and made him resign his purpose of leaving her; surely then she preferred him on the whole to Neville; yet he must go and risk his chance of possessing her—upon a personal encounter, in which Neville was at least as likely to kill him, as he to kill Neville. He saw too late that he was playing his rival's game. He felt cold and

despondent, and more and more convinced that he should never marry Kate, but that she would very likely bury him.

With all this he was too game to recoil, and indeed he hated his rival too deeply. So, like many a man before him, he was going doggedly to the field against his judgment, with little to win and all to lose.

His deeper and more solemn anxieties were diversified by a lighter one. A few days ago he had invited half the county to bury Mr. Charlton, on Saturday the nineteenth of February. But now he had gone and fixed Friday the eighteenth for a duel. A fine thing if he should be himself a corpse on Friday afternoon. Who was to receive the guests? who conduct the funeral?

The man, with all his faults, had a grateful heart: and Mr. Charlton was his benefactor, and he felt he had no right to go and get himself killed until he had paid the last rites to his best friend.



The difficulty admits of course of a comic view, and smells Hibernian: but these things seem anything but droll to those, whose lives and feelings are at stake: and indeed there was something chivalrous and touching in Griffith's vexation at the possibility of his benefactor being buried without due honours, owing to his own intemperate haste to be killed. He resolved to provide against that contingency: so, on the Thursday, he wrote an urgent letter to Mr. Houseman, telling him he must come early to the funeral, and be prepared to conduct it.

This letter was carried to Mr. Houseman's office at three o'clock on Thursday afternoon.

Mr. Houseman was not at home. He was gone to a country-house nine miles distant. But Griffith's servant was well mounted, and had peremptory orders: so he rode after Mr. Houseman, and found him at Mr. Peyton's house; whither, if you please, we too will follow him.

In the first place you must know that the real reason why Mr. Peyton looked so savage, coming out of Mr. Houseman's office, was this: Neville had said no more about the hundred pounds: and indeed had not visited the house since; so Peyton, who had now begun to reckon on this sum, went to Houseman to borrow it. But Houseman politely declined to lend it him, and gave excellent reasons. All this was natural enough; common enough: but the real reason why Houseman declined, was a truly singular one. The fact is, Catherine Peyton had made him promise to refuse.

Between that young lady and the Housemans, husband and wife, there was a sincere friendship founded on mutual esteem; and Catherine could do almost what she liked with either of them. Now, whatever might be her faults, she was a proud girl, and an intelligent one: it mortified her pride to see her father borrowing here, and borrowing there, and unable to repay: and she had also

observed that he always celebrated a new loan by a new extravagance, and so was never a penny the richer for borrowed money. He had inadvertently let fall that he should apply to Houseman. She raised no open objection, but just mounted Piebald, and rode off to Houseman, and made him solemnly promise not to lend her father a shilling.

Houseman kept his word; but his refusal cost him more pain than he had counted on when he made the promise. Squire Peyton had paid him thousands first and last; and, when he left Houseman's room, with disappointment, mortification, and humiliation, deeply marked on his features, usually so handsome and jolly, the lawyer felt sorry and ashamed—and did *not* show it.

But it rankled in him; and the very next day he took advantage of a little business he had to do in Mr. Peyton's neighbourhood, and drove to Peyton Hall and asked for Mistress Kate.

His was a curious errand. Indeed I think it would not be easy to find a parallel to it.

For here was an attorney calling upon a beautiful girl; to do what?

To soften her.

On a daughter; to do what?

To persuade her to permit him to lend her father £100 on insufficient security.

Well, he reminded her of his ancient obligations to her family, and assured her he could well afford to risk a hundred or even a thousand pounds. He then told her that her father had shown great pain at his refusal, and that he himself was human, and could not divest himself of gratitude, and pity, and good nature—all for £100. “In a word,” said he, “I have brought the money; and you must give in for this once, and let me lend it him without more ado.”

Miss Peyton was gratified, and affected; and a tear trembled a moment in her eye; but went

indoors again, and left her firm as a rock, sprinkled with dew. She told him she could quite understand his feeling, and thanked him for it: but she had long and seriously weighed the matter, and could not release him from his promise. "No more of this base borrowing," said she, and clenched her white teeth indomitably.

He attacked her with a good many weapons; but she parried them all so gently yet so nobly, and so successfully, that he admired her more than ever.

Still, lawyers fight hard; and die very hard. Houseman got warm in his cause, and cross-examined this defendant; and asked her whether *she* would refuse to lend her father £100 out of a full purse.

This question was answered only by a flash of her glorious eyes, and a magnificent look of disdain at the doubt implied.

"Well, then," said Houseman, "be your father's

surety for repayment with interest at six per centum; and then there will be nothing in the business to wound your dignity. I have many hundreds out at six per centum."

"Excuse me: that would be dishonest," said Kate; "I have no money to repay you with."

"But you have expectations."

"Nay, not I."

"I beg your pardon."

"Methinks I should know, sir. What expectations have I? and from whom?"

Houseman fidgeted on his seat; and then with some hesitation replied, "Well, from two that I know of."

"You are jesting, methinks, good Mr. Houseman," said she, reproachfully.

"Nay, dear Mistress Kate, I wish you too well to jest on such a theme."

The lawyer then fidgeted again on his seat in silence, sign of an inward struggle; during which

Kate's eye watched him with some curiosity. At last his wavering balance inclined towards revealing something or other.

"Mistress Kate," said he, "my wife and I are both your faithful friends, and humble admirers: we often say you would grace a coronet: and wish you were as rich as you are good and beautiful."

Kate turned her lovely head away, and gave him her hand. That incongruous movement, so full of womanly grace and feeling, and the soft pressure of her white hand, completed her victory, and the remains of Houseman's reserve melted away.

"Yes, my dear young lady," said he, warmly, "I have good news for you: only, mind, not a living soul must ever know it from your lips. Why, I am going to do for you what I never did in my life before; going to tell you something that passed yesterday in my office. But then I know you: you are a young lady out of a

thousand: I can trust you to be discreet, and silent; can I not?"

"As the grave."

"Well, then, my young mistress—in truth it was like a play, though the scene was but a lawyer's office——"

"Was it?" cried Kate. "Then you set me all of a flutter: you must sup here, and sleep here. Nay, nay," said she, her eyes sparkling with animation, "I'll take no denial. My father dines abroad: we shall have the house to ourselves."

Her interest was keenly excited: but she was a true woman, and must coquet with her very curiosity; so she ran off to see with her own eyes that sheets were aired, and a roasting fire lighted in the blue bedroom for her guest.

While she was away, a servant brought in Griffith Gaunt's letter, and a sheet of paper had to be borrowed to answer it.

The answer was hardly written and sent out



to Griffith's servant, when supper and the fair hostess came in almost together.

After supper fresh logs were heaped on the fire, and the lawyer sat in a cosy arm-chair, and took out his diary, and several papers, as methodically as if he was going to lay the case by counsel before a judge of assize.

Kate sat opposite him with her grey eyes beaming on him all the time, and searching for the hidden meaning of everything he told her. During the recital which follows, her colour often came and went, but those wonderful eyes never left the narrator's face a moment.

They put the attorney on his mettle, and he elaborated the matter more than I should have done: he articulated his topics; marked each salient fact by a long pause. In short he told his story like an attorney, and not like a Romancist. I cannot help that, you know; I'm not Procrustes.

## MR. HOUSEMAN'S LITTLE NARRATIVE.

“Wednesday, the seventeenth day of February, at about one of the clock, called on me at my place of business Mr. Griffith Gaunt, whom I need not here describe, inasmuch as his person and place of residence are well known to the court—what am I saying?—I mean, well known to yourself, Mistress Kate.

“The said Griffith, on entering my room seemed moved, and I might say, distempered; and did not give himself time to salute me and receive my obeisance, but addressed me abruptly and said as follows: ‘Mr. Houseman, I am come to make my will.’”

“Dear me!” said Kate: then blushed, and was more on her guard.

“I seated the young gentleman, and then

replied that his resolution aforesaid did him credit, the young being as mortal as the old. I said further that many disasters had happened, in my experience, owing to the obstinacy with which men in the days of their strength shut their eyes to the precarious tenure, under which all sons of Adam hold existence ; and so many a worthy gentleman dies in his sins. And, what is worse, dies intestate.

“But the said Griffith interrupted me with some signs of impatience, and asked me bluntly would I draw his will, and have it executed on the spot.

“I assented, generally ; but I requested him by way of needful preliminary, to obtain for me a copy of Mr. Charlton’s will, under which, as I have always understood, the said Griffith inherits whatever real estate he hath to bequeath.

“Mr. Griffith Gaunt then replied to me that Mr. Charlton’s will was in London, and the exact terms of it could not be known until after the funeral: that is to say upon the nineteenth instant.

“Thereupon I explained to Mr. Gaunt that I must see and know what properties were devised in the will aforesaid, by the said Charlton, to Gaunt aforesaid, and how devised and described. Without this, I said, I could not correctly and sufficiently describe the same in the instrument I was now requested to prepare.

“Mr. Gaunt did not directly reply to this objection. But he pondered a little while, and then asked me if it were not possible for him, by means of general terms, to bequeath to a sole legatee whatever lands, goods, chattels, etc., Mr. Charlton might hereafter prove to have devised to him, the said Griffith Gaunt.

“I admitted this was possible, but objected that it was dangerous. I let him know that in matters of law general terms are a fruitful source of dispute, and I said I was one of those who hold it a duty to avert litigation from our clients.

“Thereupon Mr. Gaunt drew out of his bosom a pocket-book.

“The said pocket-book was shown to me by the said Gaunt, and I say it contained a paragraph from a newspaper, which I believe to have been cut out of the said newspaper with a knife or a pair of scissors, or some trenchant instrument; and the said paragraph purported to contain an exact copy of a certain Will and Testament under which (as is indeed matter of public notoriety) one Dame Butcher hath inherited and now enjoys the lands, goods, and chattels of a certain merry parson

late deceased in these parts ; and, *I believe*, little missed.

“ Mr. Gaunt would have me read the Will and Testament aforesaid : and I read it accordingly : and, inasmuch as bad things are best remembered, the said Will and Testament did, by its singularity and profaneness, fix itself forthwith in my memory ; so that I can by no means dislodge it thence, do what I may.

“ The said Document, to the best of my memory and belief, runneth after this fashion : ‘ I, John Raymond, clerk, at present residing at Whitbeck, in the county of Cumberland, being a man sound in body, mind, and judgment, do deliver this as my last Will and Testament.

“ ‘ I give and bequeath all my real property, and all my personal property, and all the property whether real or personal I may hereafter possess,

or become entitled to—to my Housekeeper, Janet Butcher.

“‘And I appoint Janet Butcher my sole executrix, and I make Janet Butcher my sole residuary legatee, save and except that I leave my solemn curse to any knave, who hereafter shall at any time pretend that he does not understand the meaning of this my Will and Testament.’”

(Catherine smiled a little at this last bequest.)

“Mr. Gaunt then solemnly appealed to me as an honest man to tell him whether the aforesaid document was bad, or good, in law.

“I was fain to admit that it was sufficient in law; but I qualified, and said I thought it might be attacked on the score of the Hussy’s undue influence, and the Testator’s apparent insanity. Nevertheless, I concluded candidly, that neither objection would prevail in our courts, owing to the

sturdy prejudice in the breasts of English jurymen, whose ground of faith it is that every man has a right to do what he will with his own, and even to do it how he likes.

“Mr. Gaunt did speedily abuse this my candour. He urged me to lose no time, but to draw his will according to the form and precedent in that case made and provided by this mad parson : and my clerks forsooth were to be the witnesses thereof.

“I refused, with some heat, to sully my office by allowing such an instrument to issue therefrom : and I asked the said Gaunt, in high dudgeon, for what he took me.

“Mr. Gaunt then offered, in reply, two suggestions that shook me. Imprimis, he told me the person to whom he now desired to leave his all



was Mistress Catherine Peyton. [An ejaculation from Kate.] Secundo, he said he would go straight from me to that coxcomb Harrison, were I to refuse to serve him in the matter.

“On this, having regard to your interest and my own, I temporized; I offered to let him draw a will after his parson’s precedent, and I agreed it should be witnessed in my office: only I stipulated that next week a proper document should be drawn by myself, with due particulars, on two sheets of paper, and afterwards engrossed and witnessed: and to this Mr. Gaunt assented, and immediately drew his Will according to Newspaper Precedent.

“But, when I came to examine his masterpiece, I found he had taken advantage of my pliability to attach an unreasonable condition: to wit, that the said Catherine should forfeit all interest under

this will in case she should ever marry a certain party therein nominated, specified, and described."

("Now that was Griffith all over," cried Catherine, merrily.)

"I objected stoutly to this. I took leave to remind the young gentleman that, when a Christian man makes his last will and testament, he should think of the grave, and of the place beyond whither we may carry our affections, but must leave the bundle of our hates behind, the gate being narrow. I even went so far as to doubt whether such a proviso could stand in *law*; and I also put a practical query: what was to hinder the legatee from selling the property and diverting the funds, and then marrying whom she liked?

"Mr. Gaunt was deaf to reason. He bade me remember that he was neither Saint nor Apostle;

but a poor gentleman of Cumberland, who saw a stranger come between him and his lover dear : with that he was much moved, and did not conclude his argument at all, but broke off and was fain to hide his face with both hands awhile. In truth this touched me ; and I looked another way ; and began to ask myself why should I interfere, who, after all, know not your heart in the matter : and, to be brief, I withstood him and Parson's law no more ; but sent his draft will to the clerks, the which they copied fair in a trice, and the duplicates were signed and witnessed in red hot haste ; as most of men's follies are done for that matter.

“The paper writing now produced and shown to me—tush ! what am I saying ?—I mean the paper writing I now produce and show to you is the draft of the will aforesaid, in the handwriting of the testator.”

And with this he handed Kate Peyton Griffith

Gaunt's Will, and took a long and satirical pinch of snuff while she examined it.

Miss Peyton took the will in her white hands and read it. But, in reading it she held it up, and turned it so, that her friend could not see her face while she read it, but only her white hands, in which the document rustled a little.

It ran thus :—

“ I, Griffith Gaunt, late of the Eyrie, and now residing at Bolton Hall, in the county of Cumberland, being sound in body and mind, do deliver this as my last Will and Testament. I give and bequeath all the property real or personal, which I now possess or may hereafter become entitled to, to my dear friend and mistress, Catherine Peyton, daughter of Edward Peyton, Esquire, of Peyton Hall; provided always that the said Catherine Peyton shall at no time within the next ten years marry George Neville, of Neville's Court, in this county. But should the said Catherine marry the

said George within ten years of this day, then I leave all my said property, in possession, remainder, or reversion, to my Heir-at-law."

The fair legatee read this extraordinary testament more than once. At last she handed it back to Mr. Houseman without a word. But her cheek was red, and her eyes glistening.

Mr. Houseman was surprised at her silence, and as he was curious to know her heart, he sounded her: asked her what she thought of that part of his story. But she evaded him with all the tact of her sex. "What, that is not all then?" said she quickly.

Houseman replied that it was barely half.

"Then tell me all, pray tell me all," said Kate, earnestly.

"I am here to that end," said Houseman, and recommenced his narrative.

"The business being done to Mr. Gaunt's satisfaction, though not to mine, we fell into some

friendly talk; but in the midst of it my clerk Thomas brought me in the card of a gentleman whom I was very desirous to secure as a client.

“Mr. Gaunt I think read my mind, for he took leave of me forthwith. I attended him to the door, and then welcomed the gentleman aforesaid. It was no other than Mr. George Neville.

“Mr. Neville, after such gracious civilities as his native breeding and foreign travel have taught him, came to business and requested me—to draw his will.”

“La!” said Kate.

“I was a little startled, but hid it, and took his instructions. This done, I requested to see the title-deeds of his estates, with a view to describing them, and he went himself to the banker’s for them, and placed them in my hands.

“I then promised to have the will ready in a week or ten days. But Mr. Neville, with many polite regrets for hurrying me, told me upon his honour he could give me but twenty-four hours. ‘After that,’ said he, ‘it might be too late.’ ”

(“Ah !” said Miss Peyton.)

“Determined to retain my new client, I set my clerks to work, and this very day was engrossed, signed, and witnessed, the last will and testament of George Neville, Esquire, of Neville’s Court, in the county of Cumberland, and Leicester Square, London, where he hath a noble mansion.

“Now as to the general disposition of his lands, manorial rights, messuages, tenements, goods, chattels, etc., and his special legacies to divers ladies and gentlemen and domestic servants, these I will not reveal even to you.

“The paper I now produce is a copy of that particular bequest which I have decided to communicate to you in strict and sacred confidence.”

And he handed her an extract from George Neville’s will.

Miss Peyton then read what follows :—

“And I give and bequeath to Mistress Catherine Peyton of Peyton Hall in the said county of Cumberland in token of my respect and regard all that my freehold estate called Moulton Grange with the messuage or tenement standing and being thereon and the farm-yard buildings and appurtenances belonging thereto containing by estimation three hundred and seventy-six acres three roods and five perches be the same little more or less to hold to her the said Catherine Peyton her heirs and assigns for ever.”

The legatee laid down the paper, and leaned



her head softly on her fair hand, and her eyes explored vacancy.

“What means all this?” said she, aloud, but to herself.

Mr. Houseman undertook the office of interpreter. “Means? why that he has left you one of the snuggest estates in the county. ’Tis not quite so large as Bolton; but lies sunnier, and the land richer. Well, mistress, was I right, are you not good for a thousand pounds?”

Kate, still manifestly thinking of something else, let fall, as it were, out of her mouth that Mr. Gaunt and Mr. Neville were both men in the flower of their youth, and how was she the richer for their folly?

“Why,” said Houseman, “you will not have to wait for the death of these testators—Heaven forbid!—But what does all this making of wills show me? That both these gentlemen are deep

in love with you, and you can pick and choose : I say you can wed with Bolton Hall or Neville's Court to-morrow : so prithee let the Squire have his hundred pounds, and do you repay me at your leisure."

Miss Peyton made no reply, but leaned her exquisite head upon her hand and pondered.

She did not knit her brows, nor labour visibly at the mental oar : yet a certain reposeful gravity and a fixity of the thoughtful eye showed she was applying all the powers of her mind.

Mr. Houseman was not surprised at that : his own wife had but little intellect ; yet had he seen her weigh two rival bonnets in mortal silence, and with all the seeming profundity of a judge on the bench. And now this young lady was doubtless weighing Farms with similar gravity, care, and intelligence.

But as this continued and still she did not communicate her decision, he asked her point-blank

which of the two she settled to wed: Neville's Court, or Bolton Grange.

Thus appealed to, Miss Peyton turned her great eye on him without really looking at him, and replied, — "You have made me very uneasy."

He stared. She relapsed into thought a moment, and then, turning to Houseman, asked him how *he* accounted for those two gentlemen making their wills; they were very young to make their wills all of a sudden.

"Why," said Houseman, "Mr. Neville is a man of sense, and every man of sense makes his will; and, as for Mr. Gaunt, he has just come into prospect of an estate; that's why."

"Ah, but why could not Griffith wait till after the funeral?"

"Oh, clients are always in a hurry."

"So you see nothing in it? nothing alarming I mean?"

"Nothing very alarming. Two landed proprietors in love with you ; that is all."

"But, dear Mr. Houseman, that is what makes me uneasy: at this rate they must look on one another as—as—rivals: and you know rivals are sometimes enemies."

"Oh I see now," said Houseman: "you apprehend a quarrel between the gentlemen. Of course there is no love lost between them ; but they met in my office and saluted each other with perfect civility. I saw them with my own eyes."

"Indeed ! I am glad to hear that ; very glad. I hope it was only a coincidence then, their both making their wills."

"Nothing more you may depend: neither of them knows from me what the other has done ; nor ever will."

"That is true," said Kate, and seemed considerably relieved.

To ease her mind entirely, Houseman went on

to say that as to the report that high words had passed between the clients in question, at the Roebuck, he had no doubt it was exaggerated. "Besides," said he, "that was not about a lady; I'm told it was about a horse. Some bet belike."

Catherine uttered a faint cry. "About a horse!" said she. "Not about a grey horse?"

"Nay, that is more than I know."

"High words about a horse," said Catherine; "and they are making their wills. Oh! my mind misgave me from the first." And she turned pale. Presently she clasped her hands together—"Mr. Houseman!" she cried, "what shall I do? What, do you not see that both their lives are in danger? and that is why they make their wills. And how should *both* their lives be in danger, but from each other? Madmen! they have quarrelled: they are going to fight; fight to the death: and I fear it is about me. Me who love neither of them, you know."

"In that case, *let* them fight," said her legal adviser, dispassionately. "Whichever fool gets killed, you will be none the poorer." And the dog wore a sober complacency.

Catherine turned her large eyes on him with horror and amazement, but said nothing.

As for the lawyer he was more struck with her sagacity than with anything. He somewhat over-rated it; not being aware of the private reasons she had for suspecting that her two testators were enemies to the death.

"I almost think you are right," said he; "for I got a curious missive from Mr. Gaunt scarce an hour ago, and he says,—let me see what he says. "Nay, let *me* see," said Kate. On that he handed her Griffith's note. It ran thus—

"It is possible I may not be able to conduct the funeral. Should this be so, I appoint you to act

for me. So then, good Mr. Houseman, let me count on you to be here at nine of the clock. For Heaven's sake fail me not.

“Your humble Servant,

“G. G.”

This left no doubt in Kate's mind.

“Now, first of all,” said she, “what answer made you to this?”

“What answer should I make? I pledged my word to be at Bolton at nine of the clock.”

“Oh, blind!” sighed Kate. “And I must be out of the room. What shall I do? My dear friend, forgive me: I am a wretched girl. I am to blame; I ought to have dismissed them both, or else decided between them. But who would have thought it would go this length? I did not think Griffith was brave enough. Have pity on me, and help me. Stop this fearful fighting.” And now the young creature clung to the man of

business, and prayed and prayed him earnestly to avert bloodshed.

Mr. Houseman was staggered by this passionate appeal from one who so rarely lost her self-command. He soothed her as well as he could, and said he would do his best; but added, which was very true, that he thought her interference would be more effective than his own. "What care these young bloods for an old attorney? I should fare ill, came I between their rapiers. To be sure I might bind them over to keep the peace. But Mistress Kate, now be frank with me; then I can serve you better. You love one of these two; that is clear. Which is the man? that I may know what I am about."

For all her agitation Kate was on her guard in some things.

"Nay," she faltered, "I love neither, not to say love them: but I pity him so."

"Which?"



“Both.”

“Ay, mistress; but which do you pity most?” asked the shrewd lawyer.

“Whichever shall come to harm for my sake,” replied the simple girl.

“You could not go to them to-night, and bring them to reason?” asked she, piteously. She went to the window to see what sort of a night it was; she drew the heavy crimson curtains and opened the window. In rushed a bitter blast laden with flying snow. The window ledges too were clogged with snow, and all the ground was white.

Houseman shuddered, and drew nearer to the blazing logs. Kate closed the window with a groan. “It is not to be thought of,” said she; “at your age; and not a road to be seen for snow. What shall I do?”

“Wait till to-morrow,” said Mr. Houseman. (Procrastination was his daily work, being an attorney.) “To-morrow!” cried Catherine. Per-

haps even now they have met, and he lies a corpse."

"Who?"

"Whichever it is, I shall end my days in a convent praying for his soul." She wrung her hands while she said this, and still there was no catching her.

Little did the lawyer think to rouse such a storm with his good news. And now he made a feeble and vain attempt to soothe her; and ended by promising to start the first thing in the morning and get both her testators bound over to keep the peace, by noon. With this resolution he went to bed early.

She was glad to be alone at all events.

Now, mind you, there were plenty of vain and vulgar, yet respectable girls, in Cumberland, who would have been delighted to be fought about, even though bloodshed were to be the result. But this young lady was not vain, but proud;

she was sensitive too, and troubled with a conscience. It reproached her bitterly: it told her she had permitted the addresses of two gentlemen, and so mischief had somehow arisen—out of her levity. Now her life had been uneventful, and innocent: this was the very first time she had been connected with anything like a crime; and her remorse was great: so was her grief; but her fears were greater still. The terrible look Griffith had cast at his rival flashed back on her; so did his sinister words. She felt that if he and Neville met, nothing less than Neville's death or his own would separate them. Suppose that even now one of them lay a corpse! cold and ghastly as the snow that now covered Nature's face.

The agitation of her mind was such, that her body could not be still: now she walked the room in violent distress, wringing her hands; now she kneeled and prayed fervently for both those lives

she had endangered : often she flew to the window and looked eagerly out, writhing and rebelling against the network of female custom that entangled her, and would not let her fly out of her cage even to do a good action ; to avert a catastrophe by her prayers, or her tears, or her good sense.

And all ended in her realizing that she was a woman, a poor impotent being born to lie quiet and let things go : at that she wept helplessly.

So wore away the first night of agony this young creature ever knew.

Towards morning, exhausted by her inward struggles, she fell asleep upon a sofa.

But her trouble followed her. She dreamed she was on a horse, hurried along with prodigious rapidity, in a darkened atmosphere, a sort of dry fog : she knew somehow she was being taken to see some awful, mysterious thing. By-and-by the haze cleared, and she came out upon pleasant open

sunny fields that almost dazzled her. She passed gates, and hedges too, all clear, distinct, and individual. Presently a voice by her side said "This way!" and her horse seemed to turn of his own accord through a gap, and in one moment she came on a group of gentlemen. It was Griffith Gaunt, and two strangers. Then she spoke, and said, "But, Mr. Neville?"

No answer was made her ; but the group opened in solemn silence, and there lay George Neville on the snow, stark and stiff, with blood issuing from his temple, and trickling along the snow.

She saw distinctly all his well-known features ; but they were pinched and sharpened now. And his dark olive skin was turned to bluish white. It was his corpse. And now her horse thrust out his nose and snorted like a demon. She looked down, and ah! the blood was running at her preternaturally fast along the snow. She screamed, her horse reared high, and she was falling on the

blood-stained snow : she awoke screaming ; and the sunlight seemed to rush in at the window.

Her joy that it was only a dream overpowered every other feeling at first. She kneeled and thanked God for that.

The next thing was, she thought it might be a revelation of what had actually occurred.

But this chilling fear did not affect her long. Nothing could shake her conviction that a duel was on foot—and indeed the intelligent of her sex do sometimes put this and that together, and spring to a just but obvious inference, in a way that looks to a slower and safer reasoner like divination—but then she knew that yesterday evening both parties were alive. Coupling this with Griffith's broad hint that after the funeral might be too late to make his will, she felt sure that it was this very day the combatants were to meet. Yes, and this very morning : for she knew that gentlemen always fought in the morning.

If her dream was false as to the past, it might be true as to what was at hand. Was it not a supernatural warning sent to her in mercy? The history of her church abounded in such dreams and visions; and indeed the time and place she lived in were rife with stories of the kind; one, in particular, of recent date.

This thought took hold of her, and grew on her, till it overpowered even the diffidence of her sex; and then up started her individual character; and now nothing could hold her. For, languid and dreamy in the common things of life, this Catherine Peyton was one of those who rise into rare ardour and activity in such great crises as seem to benumb the habitually brisk, and they turn tame and passive.

She had seen at a glance that Houseman was too slow and apathetic for such an emergency; she resolved to act herself. She washed her face and neck and arms and hands in cold water, and

was refreshed and invigorated. She put on her riding habit and her little gold spur; Griffith Gaunt had given it her; and hurried into the stable-yard.

Old Joe and his boy had gone away to breakfast: he lived in the village.

This was unlucky: Catherine must wait his return and lose time, or else saddle the horse herself. She chose the latter. The piebald was a good horse, but a fidgety one; so she saddled and bridled him at his stall. She then led him out to the stone steps in the stable-yard, and tried to mount him. But he sidled away; she had nobody to square him; and she could get nothing to mount but his head. She coaxed him, she tickled him on the other side with her whip. It was all in vain.

It was absurd, but heart-sickening. She stared at him with wonder that he could be so cruel as to play the fool when every minute might be life



or death. She spoke to him, she implored him piteously ; she patted him. All was in vain.

As a last resource she walked him back to the stable and gave him a sievelful of oats, and set it down by the corn bin for him, and took an opportunity to mount the bin softly.

He ate the oats, but with retroverted eye watched her. She kept quiet and affected nonchalance till he became less cautious : then suddenly sprang on him, and taught him to set his wit against a woman's. My lord wheeled round directly ere she could get her leg over the pommel ; and made for the stable door. She lowered her head to his mane and just scraped out without injury ; not an inch to spare. He set off at once ; but luckily for her she had often ridden a bare-backed horse. She sat him for the first few yards by balance ; then reined him in quietly, and soon whipped her left foot into the stirrup and her right leg over the pommel ; and then the piebald nag had to pay for

his pranks: the roads were clogged with snow, but she fanned him along without mercy, and never drew bridle till she pulled him up drenched, and steaming like a wash-tub, at Netley cross-roads.

Here she halted irresolute: the road to the right led to Bolton, distant two miles and a half. The road in front led to Neville's Court, distant three miles. Which should she take? She had asked herself this a dozen times upon the road; yet could never decide until she got to the place, and *must*. The question was, with which of them had she most influence? She hardly knew; but Griffith Gaunt was her old sweetheart; it seemed somewhat less strange and indelicate to go to him than to the new one: so she turned her horse's head towards Bolton; but she no longer went quite so fast as she had gone before she felt going to either in particular. Such is the female mind.

She reached Bolton at half-past eleven; and

now she was there, put a bold face on it; rode up to the door, and, leaning forward on her horse, rang the hall bell.

A footman came to the door.

With composed visage though beating heart, she told him she desired to speak for a moment to Mr. Griffith Gaunt. He asked her would she be pleased to alight: and it was clear by his manner no calamity had yet fallen. "No, no," said Kate, "let me speak to him here."

The servant went in to tell his master. Kate sat quiet with her heart still beating, but glowing now with joy: she was in time then, thanks to her good horse. She patted him, and made the prettiest excuses aloud to him for riding him so hard through the snow.

The footman came back to say that Mr. Gaunt had gone out.

"Gone out? Whither? On horseback?"

The footman did not know, but would ask within.

While he was gone to inquire, Catherine lost patience, and rode into the stable-yard, and asked a young lout who was lounging there whether his master was gone out on horseback.

The lounging youth took the trouble to call out the groom, and asked him.

The groom said "No," and that Mr. Gaunt was somewhere about the grounds he thought.

But in the midst of this colloquy one of the maids, curious to see the lady, came out by the kitchen door and curtsied to Kate, and told her Mr. Gaunt was gone out walking with two other gentlemen. In the midst of her discourse she recognized the visitor, and having somehow imbibed the notion that Miss Peyton was likely to be Mrs. Gaunt, and govern Bolton Hall, decided to curry favour with her; so she called her my lady, and was very communicative. She said one of the gentlemen was strange to her; but the other was Doctor Islip from Stanhope town. She knew him well:

he had taken off her own brother's leg in a jiffey. "But, dear heart, Mistress," said she, "how pale you be. Do come in and have a morsel of meat, and a horn of ale."

"Nay, my good girl," said Kate; "I could not eat; but bring me a mug of new milk if you will. I have not broken my fast this day."

The maid bustled in, and Catherine asked the groom if there were no means of knowing where Mr. Gaunt was. The groom and the boy scratched their heads and looked puzzled. The lounging lout looked at their perplexity, and grinned satirically.

This youth was Tom Leicester, born in wedlock, and therefore in the law's eye son of old Simon Leicester; but gossips said his true father was the late Captain Gaunt. Tom ran with the hounds for his own sport: went out shooting with gentlemen and belaboured the briars for them at twopence per day and his dinner, and abhorred all that sober men call work.

By trade, a Beater: profession, a Scamp.

Two maids came out together now; one with the milk and a roll, the other with a letter. Catherine drank the milk but could not eat. Then says the other maid, "If so be you are Mistress Peyton, why this letter is for you: Master left it on his table in his bedroom."

Kate took the letter and opened it, all in a flutter. It ran thus:—

"SWEET MISTRESS,—When this reaches you, I shall be no more here to trouble you with my jealousy. This Neville set it abroad that you had changed horses with him, as much as to say you had plighted troth with him. He is a liar, and I told him so to his teeth. We are to meet at noon this day: and one must die. Methinks I shall be the one. But, come what may, I have taken care of thee; ask Jack Houseman else. But, oh dear Kate, think of all that hath passed between us,

and do not wed this Neville, or I could not rest in my grave. Sweetheart, many a letter have I written thee, but none so sad as this. Let the grave hide my faults from thy memory ; think only that I loved thee well. I leave thee my substance ; would it were ten times more ; and the last thought of my heart.

“ So no more in this world,

“ From him that is thy true-lover

“ And humble servant till death,

“ GRIFFITH GAUNT.”

There seems to be room in the mind for only one violent emotion at one instant of time. This touching letter did not just then draw a tear from her who now received it some hours sooner than the writer intended. Its first effect was to paralyze her. She sat white and trembling, and her great eyes filled with horror. Then she began to scream wildly for help. The men and women came round her.

"Murder! Murder!" she shrieked. "Tell me where to find him, ye wretches, or may his blood be on your heads!"

The scamp bounded from his lounging position and stood before her straight as an arrow. "FOLLOW ME," he shouted. Her grey eyes and the scamp's black ones, flashed into one another directly. He dashed out of the yard without another word.

And she spurred her horse, and clattered out after him.

He ran as fast as her horse could canter, and soon took her all round the house: and, while he ran, his black, gipsy eyes were glancing in every direction.

When they got to the lawn at the back of the house, he halted a moment, and said quietly, "Here they be." He pointed to some enormous footsteps in the snow, and bade her notice that they commenced at a certain glass door belonging



to the house, and that they all pointed outwards. The lawn was covered with such marks, but the scamp followed those his intelligence had selected, and they took him through a gate, and down a long walk, and into the park. Here no other feet had trodden that morning except those Tom Leicester was following. "This is our game," said he. "See, there be six footsteps; and, now I look, this here track is Squire Gaunt's. I know his foot in the snow among a hundred. Bless your heart, I've often been out shooting with Squire Gaunt, and lost him in the woods, and found him again by tracking him on dead leaves, let alone snow. I say, wasn't they useless idiots? couldn't tell ye how to run into a man, and snow on the ground! Why you can track a hare to her form and a rat to his hole—let alone such big game as this, with a hoof like a frying-pan—in the snow."

"Oh, do not talk; let us make haste," panted Kate.

“Canter away,” replied the scamp.

She cantered on, and he ran by her side.  
“Shall I not tire you?” said she.

The mauvais sujet laughed at her. “Tire *me*! not over this ground. Why, I run with the hounds, and mostly always in at the death: but that is not altogether speed; ye see I know Pug’s mind. What, don’t you know *me*? I’m Tom Leicester. Why, I know you: I say, you’re a good-hearted one, you are.”

“Oh no! no!” sighed Kate.

“Nay, but you are,” said Tom. “I saw you take Harrowden brook that day, when the rest turned tail; and that is what I call having a good heart: gently, mistress, here, this is full of rabbit holes; I’ve seen Sir Ralph’s sorrel mare break her leg in a moment in one of these. Shot her dead that afternoon, a did, and then biled her for the hounds. She’d often followed at their tails; next hunting day she ran inside their bellies. Ha! ha! ha!”

“Oh, don’t laugh. I am in agony.”

“Why, what is up, mistress?” asked the young savage, lowering his voice. ‘Murder,’ says you; but that means *nought*. The lasses they cry murder if you do but kiss ’em.”

“Oh, Tom Leicester, it *is* murder. It’s a duel, a fight to the death, unless we are in time to prevent them.”

“A jewel!” cried Master Leicester, his eyes glittering with delight. “I never saw a jewel. Don’t you hold him in for me, mistress: gallop down this slope as hard as you can pelt; it is grass under foot, and ye can’t lose the tracks, and I shall be sure to catch ye in the next field.”

The young savage was now as anxious to be in at the death, as Kate was to save life. As he spoke he gave her horse a whack on the quarter with his stick, and away she went full gallop, and soon put a hundred yards between her and Tom.”

The next field was a deep fallow; and the hard

furrows reduced her to a trot; and before she got out of it, Tom was by her side: "Didn't I tell you?" said he. "I'd run you to Peyton Hall for a pot o' beer."

"Oh you good, brave, clever boy," said Kate: "how fortunate I am to have you. I think we shall be in time."

Tom was flattered. "Why you see I am none of Daddy Leicester's breed," said he. "I'm a gentleman's by-blow, if you know what that is."

"I can't say I do," said Kate; "but I know you are very bold and handsome and swift of foot, and I know my patron saint has sent you to me in my misery, and oh, my lad, if we are in time—what can I do for you?—Are you fond of money, Tom?"

"That I be: when I can get it."

"Then you shall have all I have got in the world, if you get me there in time to hinder mischief."

“Come on!” shouted Tom, excited in his turn; and took the lead, and not a word more passed till they came to the foot of a long hill. Then said Tom, “Once we are at top of this, they can’t fight without our seeing ’em. That is Scutchem-see Nob: you can see ten miles all round from there.”

At this information Kate uttered an ejaculation and urged her horse forward.

The first part of this hill, which stood between her and those whose tracks she followed, was grass; then came a strip of turnips; then on the bleak top a broad piece of heather. She soon cantered over the grass; and left Tom so far behind he could not quite catch her in the turnips. She entered the heather, but here she was much retarded by the snow drifts, and the ups and downs of the rough place. But she struggled on bravely, still leading.

She fixed her eyes earnestly on the ridge,

whence she could cry to the combatants, however distant, and stop the combat.

Now as she struggled on, and Tom came after, panting a little for the first time, suddenly there rose from the crest of the hill two columns of smoke, and the next moment two sharp reports rang through the frosty air.

Kate stopped ; and looked round to Tom with a scared, inquiring air.

"Pistols !" yelled Tom behind her.

At that the woman overpowered the heroine ; and Kate hid her face and fell to trembling and wailing. Her wearied horse came down to a walk.

Presently up comes Tom. "Don't lose your stomach for that," he panted out. "Gentlefolks do pop at one another all day sometimes, and no harm done."

"Oh, bless you !" cried Kate ; "I may yet be in time." She spurred her horse on. He did his

best, but ere he had gone twenty yards, he plunged into a cavity hidden by the snow.

While he was floundering there crack went a single pistol, and the smoke rose and drifted over the hill top.

"Who—op!" muttered Tom, with horrible sang-froid. "There's one done for this time. Couldn't shoot back, ye see."

At this horrible explanation, Kate sank forward on her horse's mane as if she herself had been killed; and the smoke from the pistol came floating, thinner and thinner, and eddied high over her head.

Tom spoke rude words of encouragement to her. She did not even seem to hear them. Then he lost all patience at her, and clutched her arm to make her hear him. But at that it seemed as if some of his nature passed into her down his arm, for she turned wild directly and urged her horse fiercely up the crest. Her progress was slow at

first; but the sun had melted the snow on the Nob or extreme summit. She tore her way through the last of the snow on to the clear piece, then, white as ashes, spurred and lashed her horse over the ridge and dashed in amongst them on the other side. For there they were.

What was the sight that met her eyes?

That belongs to the male branch of my story, and shall be told forthwith, but in its proper sequence.



## CHAPTER VI.

THE two combatants came to the field in a very different spirit. Neville had already fought two duels, and been successful in both. He had confidence in his skill, and in his luck. His conscience too was tolerably clear: for he was the insulted person; and, if a bullet should remove this dangerous rival from his path, why all the better for him, and all the worse for the fool who had brought the matter to a bloody issue, though the balance of the lady's heart inclined his way.

He came in high spirits, and rode upon Kate Peyton's grey, to sting his adversary, and show his contempt of him.

Not so Griffith Gaunt. His heart was heavy, and foreboded ill. It was his first duel, and he expected to be killed. He had played a fool's game, and he saw it.

The night before the duel he tried hard to sleep: he knew it was not giving his nerves fair play to lie thinking all night. But coy sleep, as usual when most wanted, refused to come. At daybreak the restless man gave it up in despair, and rose and dressed himself. He wrote that letter to Catherine, little thinking it would fall into her hands while he lived. He ate a little toast and drank a pint of Burgundy; and then wandered listlessly about till Major Rickards, his second, arrived.

That experienced gentleman brought a surgeon with him; Mr. Islip.

Major Rickards deposited a shallow wooden box in the hall; and the two gentlemen sat down to a hearty breakfast.

Griffith took care of his guests, but beyond that spoke scarcely a word; and the surgeon, after a ghastly attempt at commonplaces, was silent too. Major Rickards satisfied his appetite first, and then, finding his companions dumb, set to work to keep up their spirits. He entertained them with a narrative of the personal encounters he had witnessed, and especially of one in which his principal had fallen on his face at the first fire, and the antagonist had sprung into the air, and both had lain dead as door nails, and never moved, nor even winked, after that single discharge.

Griffith sat under this chilling talk for more than an hour.

At last he rose gloomily, and said it was time to go.

“Got your tools, doctor?” inquired the Major.

The surgeon nodded slightly. He was more discreet than his friend.

When they had walked nearly a mile in the

snow, the Major began to complain. "The devil!" said he; "this is queer walking. My boots are full of water. I shall catch my death."

The surgeon smiled satirically, comparing silent Griffith's peril with his second's.

Griffith took no notice. He went like Fortitude plodding to Execution.

Major Rickards fell behind, and whispered Mr. Islip: "Don't like his looks; doesn't march like a winner. A job for you or the sexton, you mark my words."

They toiled up Scutchemsee Nob, and when they reached the top, they saw Neville and his second, Mr. Hammersley, riding towards them. The pair had halters as well as bridles, and dismounting, made their nags fast to a large black-thorn that grew there. The seconds then stepped forward and saluted each other with formal civility.

Griffith looked at the grey horse, and ground his teeth. The sight of the animal in Neville's possession stirred up his hate, and helped to steel his heart. He stood apart, still, pale and gloomy.

The seconds stepped out fifteen paces, and placed the men. Then they loaded two pair of pistols, and put a pistol in each man's hand.

Major Rickards took that opportunity to advise his principal. "Stand sharp. Keep your arm close to your side. Don't fire too high. How do you feel?"

"Like a man who must die; but will try to die in company."

The seconds now withdrew to their places, and the rivals held their pistols lowered: but fixed their deadly eyes on each other.

The eye, in such a circumstance, is a terrible thing: it is literally a weapon of destruction; for it directs the deadly hand that guides the deadly

bullet. Moreover the longer and the more steadily the duellist fixes his eye on his adversary, the less likely he is to miss.

Griffith was very pale, but dogged. Neville was serious, but firm. Both eyed each other unflinchingly.

“Gentlemen, are you ready?” asked Neville’s second.

{ “Yes.”  
{ “Yes.”

“Then,” said Major Rickards, “you will fire when I let fall this handkerchief, and not before. Mark me, gentlemen ; to prevent mistakes, I shall say ‘one—— two —— three ’ ——and then drop the handkerchief. Now then, once more, are you quite ready?”

{ “Yes.”  
{ “Yes.”

“One—— Two—— Three.”  
——He dropped the handkerchief, and both

gentlemen fired simultaneously. Mr. Neville's hat spun into the air ; Griffith stood untouched.

The bullet had passed through Neville's hat, and had actually cut a lane through his magnificent hair.

The seconds now consulted, and it was intimated to Griffith that a word of apology would be accepted by his antagonist.

Griffith declined to utter a syllable of apology.

Two more pistols were given the men.

" Aim lower," said Rickards.

" I mean to," said Griffith.

The seconds withdrew, and the men eyed each other : Griffith dogged and pale, as before, Neville not nearly so self-assured ; Griffith's bullet, in grazing him, had produced the effect of a sharp, cold, current of air no wider than a knife. It was like death's icy forefinger laid on his head, to mark him for the next shot ; as men mark a tree ; then come again and fell it.

“One————two————three!”

And Griffith's pistol missed fire, but Neville's went off, and Griffith's arm sank powerless, and his pistol rolled out of his hand. He felt a sharp twinge, and then something trickle down his arm.

The surgeon and both seconds ran to him.

“Nay, it is nothing,” said he, “I shoot far better with my left hand than my right. Give me another pistol, and let me have fair play. He has hit me. And now I'll hit him.”

Both seconds agreed this was impossible.

“It is the chance of war,” said Major Rickards: “you cannot be allowed to take a cool shot at Mr. Neville. If you fire again, so must he.”

“The affair may very well end here,” said Mr. Hammersley. “I understand there was some provocation on our side; and on behalf of the party insulted I am content to let the matter end, Mr. Gaunt being wounded.”



"I demand my second shot to his third," said Griffith sternly; "he will not decline, unless he is a poltroon as well as —— what I called him."

The nature of this reply was communicated to Neville, and the seconds, with considerable reluctance, loaded two more pistols; and during the process Major Rickards glanced at the combatants.

Griffith, exasperated by his wound and his jealousy, was wearing out the chivalrous courage of his adversary; and the Major saw it. His keen eye noticed that Neville was getting restless, and looking confounded at his despised rival's pertinacity: and that Gaunt was more dogged, and more deadly.

"My man will kill yours this time," said he, quietly, to Neville's second. "I can see it in his eye; he is hungry; t'other has had his bellyful."

Once more the men were armed, and the seconds withdrew to their places, intimating that

this was the last shot they would allow under any circumstances whatever.

“Are you both ready?”

{ “Yes.”  
{ “Yes.”

A faint wail seemed to echo the response.

All heard it, and in that superstitious age believed it to be some mysterious herald of death.

It suspended even Major Rickard's voice a minute. He recovered himself, however, and once more his soldier-like tones rang in the keen air:—

“One———”

There was a great rushing, and a pounding of the hard ground, and a scarlet Amazon galloped in and drew up in the middle, right between the levelled pistols.

Every eye had been so bent on the combatants, that Kate Peyton and her horse seemed to have sprung out of the very earth. And there she sat,

pale as ashes, on the steaming piebald, and glanced from pistol to pistol.

The duellists stared in utter amazement, and instinctively lowered their weapons; for she had put herself right in their line of fire, with a recklessness that contrasted nobly with her fear for others. In short this apparition literally petrified them all, seconds as well as combatants.

And, while they stood open-mouthed yet dumb, in came the Scamp, and, with a brisk assumption of delegated authority, took Griffith's weapon out of his now unresisting hand; then marched to Neville. He instantly saluted Catherine, and then handed his pistol to her seeming agent, with a high-bred and inimitable air of utter nonchalance.

Kate, seeing them to her surprise so easily disarmed, raised her hands and her lovely eyes to Heaven, and in a feeble voice, thanked God and St. Nescioquis.

But very soon that faint voice quavered away to

nothing, and her fair head was seen to droop, and her eyes to close; then her body sank slowly forward like a broken lily; and in another moment she lay fainting on the snow beside her steaming horse.

He never moved, he was so dead beat too.

O lame and impotent conclusion of a vigorous exploit! Masculine up to the crowning point, and then to go and spoil all with "woman's weakness."

"N.B: This is rote sarcasticul," as Artemus, the delicious, says. Woman's weakness! If Solomon had planned and Samson executed, they could not have served her turn better than this most seasonable swooning did. For lo! at her fall the doughty combatants uttered a yell of dismay, and there was an indiscriminate rush towards the fair sufferer.

But the surgeon claimed his rights:—"This is my business," said he, authoritatively; "do not crowd on her, gentlemen; give her air."

Whereupon the duellists and seconds stood respectfully aloof in a mixed group, and watched with eager interest and pity.

The surgeon made a hole in the snow and laid his fair patient's head low. "Don't be alarmed," said he: "she has swooned; that is all."

It was all mighty fine to say don't be alarmed. But her face was ashy, and her lips the colour of lead: and she was so like death, they could not help being terribly alarmed: and now, for the first time, the duellists felt culprits; and, as for fighting, every idea of such a thing went out of their heads: the rivals now were but rival nurses: and never did a lot of women make more fuss over a child, than all these bloodthirsty men did over this Amazon manquée. They produced their legendary lore: one's grandmother had told him burnt feathers were the thing; another, from an equally venerable source, had gathered that those pink palms must be profanely slapped by the

horny hand of a man ; for at no less a price could resuscitation be obtained. The surgeon scorning all their legends, Griffith and Neville made hasty rushes with brandy and usquebagh ; but whether to be taken internally or externally, they did not say, nor indeed know ; but only thrust their flasks wildly on the doctor : and he declined them loftily. He melted snow in his hand, and dashed it hard in her face ; and put salts close to her pretty little nostrils. And this he repeated many times, without effect.

But at last her lips began to turn from lead colour to white, and then from white to pink, and her heavenly eyes to open again, and her mouth to murmur things pitiably small and not bearing on the matter in hand.

Her cheek was still colourless, when her consciousness came back, and she found she was lying on the ground with ever so many gentlemen looking at her.

At that, Modesty alarmed sent the blood at once rushing to her pale cheek.

A lovely lily seemed turning to a lovely rose before their eyes.

The next thing was, she hid that blushing face in her hands, and began to whimper.

The surgeon encouraged her: "Nay, we are all friends," he whispered, paternally.

She half parted her fingers and peered through them at Neville and Gaunt. Then she remembered all, and began to cry hysterically.

New dismay of sanguinary unprofessionals!

"*Now*, gentlemen, if you will lend me your flasks," said Mr. Islip, mighty calmly.

"Griffith and Neville were instantly at his side, each with a flask.

The surgeon administered snow and brandy. Kate sipped these, and gulped down her sobs, and at last cried composedly.

But, when it came to sipping brandied snow and

crying comfortably, Major Rickards's anxiety gave place to curiosity. Without taking his eye off her he beckoned Mr. Hammersley apart, and whispered, "Who the deuce is it?"

"Don't you know?" whispered the other in return. "Why Mistress Peyton herself."

"What, the girl it is all about? Well, I never heard of such a thing: the *causa belli* to come galloping, and swooning, on the field of battle, and so stop the fighting! What will our ladies do next? By Heaven, she is worth fighting for though. Which is the happy man, I wonder? She doesn't look at either of them."

"Ah!" said the gentleman, "that is more than I know, more than Neville knows, more than anybody knows."

"Bet you a guinea *she* knows; and lets it out before she leaves the field," said Major Rickards.

Mr. Hammersley objected to an even bet; but



said he would venture one to three she did not. It was an age of bets.

“Done !” said the Major.

By this time Kate had risen, with Mr. Islip’s assistance, and was now standing with her hand upon the piebald’s mane. She saw Rickards and Hammersley were whispering about her, and she felt very uneasy : so she told Mr. Islip timidly she desired to explain her conduct to all the gentlemen present, and avert false reports.

They were soon all about her, and she began with the most engaging embarrassment by making excuses for her weakness. She said she had ridden all the way from home, fasting ; *that* was what had upset her. The gentlemen took the cue directly, and vowed eagerly and unanimously it was enough to upset a porter.

“But indeed,” resumed Kate, blushing, “I did not come here to make a fuss, and be troublesome ; but to prevent mischief, and clear up the strangest

misunderstanding between two worthy gentlemen that are, both of them, my good friends."

She paused, and there was a chilling silence : everybody felt she was getting on ticklish ground now. She knew that well enough herself. But she had a good rudder to steer by, called Mother-wit.

Says she, with inimitable coolness, "Mr. Gaunt is an old friend of mine, and a little too sensitive where I am concerned. Some chatter-box has been and told him Mr. Neville should say I have changed horses with him ; and on that the gossips put their own construction. Mr. Gaunt hears all this, and applies insulting terms to Mr. Neville. Nay, do not deny it, Mr. Gaunt, for I have it here in your own handwriting.

"As for Mr. Neville, he merely defends his honour, and is little to blame. But now I shall tell the true story about these horses, and make you all ashamed of this sorry quarrel.

"Gentlemen, thus it is : a few days ago Mr.

Gaunt bade me farewell, and started for foreign parts. He had not been long gone when word came from Bolton that Mr. Charlton was no more. You know how sudden it was. Consider, gentlemen; him dead, and his heir riding off to the Continent in ignorance. So I thought, 'Oh what shall I do?' Just then Mr. Neville visited me, and I told him: on that he offered me his piebald horse to carry the news after Mr. Gaunt, because my grey was too tired; it was the day we drew Yew-tree Brow, and crossed Harrowden brook, you know——"

Griffith interrupted her: "Stay a bit," said he: "this is news to me. You never told me he had lent you the piebald nag to do me a good turn."

"Did I not?" said Kate, mighty innocently. "Well, but I tell you now. Ask him; he cannot deny it. As for the rest, it was all done in a hurry; Mr. Neville had no horse now to ride home with; he did me the justice to think I should be

very ill pleased were he to trudge home a-foot and suffer for his courtesy; so he borrowed my grey, to keep him out of the mire; and indeed the ways were fouler than usual, with the rains. Was there any ill in all this? *HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE!* say I."

The gentlemen all sided loudly with her on this appeal—except Neville, who held his tongue, and smiled at her plausibility; and Griffith, who hung his head at her siding with Neville.

At last he spoke and said sorrowfully: "If you did exchange horses with him, of course I have only to ask his pardon—and go."

Catherine reflected a moment before she replied.

"Well," said she, "I did exchange, and I did not. Why quarrel about a word? certainly he took my horse, and I took his; but it was only for the nonce. Mr. Neville is foreign bred, and an example to us all: he knows his piebald is worth two of my grey, and so he was too fine a gentle-

man to send me back my old hunter and ask for his young charger. He waited for me to do that; and, if anybody deserves to be shot, it must be Me. But, dear heart, I did not foresee all this fuss; I said to myself, 'La, Mr. Neville will be sure to call on my father or me some day, or else I shall be out on the piebald, and meet him on the grey, and then we can each take our own again.' Was I so far out in my reckoning? Is not that my Rosinante yonder? Here, Tom Leicester, you put my side-saddle on that grey horse, and the man's saddle on the piebald there.—And now, Griffith Gaunt, it is your turn: you must withdraw your injurious terms, and end this superlative folly."

Griffith hesitated.

"Come," said Kate, "consider; Mr. Neville is esteemed by all the county: you are the only gentleman in it who have ever uttered a disparaging word against him. Are you sure you are

more free from passion and prejudice, and wiser than all the county? oblige *me*, and do what is right. Come, Griffith Gaunt; let your reason unsay the barbarous words your passion hath uttered against a worthy gentleman, whom we all esteem."

Her habitual influence, and these last words, spoken with gentle and persuasive dignity, turned the scale. Griffith turned to Neville, and said in a low voice that he began to fear he had been hasty, and used harsher words than the occasion justified: he was going to stammer out something more, but Neville interrupted him with a noble gesture: "That is enough, Mr. Gaunt," said he. "I do not feel quite blameless in the matter: and have no wish to mortify an honourable adversary unnecessarily."

"Very handsomely said," put in Major Rickards: "and now let me have a word. I say that both gentlemen have conducted themselves like

men—under fire ; and that honour is satisfied, and the misunderstanding at an end. As for my principal here, he has shown he can fight, and now he has shown he can hear reason against himself, when the lips of beauty utter it. I approve his conduct from first to last, and am ready to defend it in all companies, and in the field, should it ever be impugned.”

Kate coloured with pleasure, and gave her hand eloquently to the Major. He bowed over it, and kissed the tips of her fingers.

“Oh ! sir,” she said, looking on him now as a friend, “I dreamed I saw Mr. Neville lying dead upon the snow, with the blood trickling from his temple.”

At this Neville’s dark cheek glowed with pleasure. So ! it was her anxiety on *his* account had brought her here.

Griffith heard too, and sighed patiently.

Assured by Major Rickards that there neither

could nor should be any more fighting, Kate made her adieux, mounted her grey horse, and rode off, discreetly declining all attendance. She beckoned Tom Leicester, however. But he pretended not to see the signal; and let her go alone. His motive for lingering behind was characteristic, and will transpire shortly.

As soon as she was gone, Griffith Gaunt quietly reminded the surgeon that there was a bullet in his arm all this time.

“Bless my soul!” said Mr. Islip, “I forgot that; I was so taken up with the lady.”

Griffith’s coat was now taken off, and the bullet searched for: it had entered the fleshy part of his arm below the elbow, and, passing round the bone, projected just under the skin. The surgeon made a slight incision, and then, pressing with his finger and thumb, out it rolled. Griffith put it in his pocket.

Neville had remained out of civility, and now



congratulated his late antagonist, and himself, that it was no worse.

The last words that passed between the rivals on this occasion were worth recording, and characteristic of the time.

Neville addressed Gaunt with elaborate courtesy, and to this effect: "I find myself in a difficulty, sir. You did me the honour to invite me to Mr. Charlton's funeral, and I accepted: but now I fear to intrude a guest, the sight of whom may be disagreeable to you. And, on the other hand, my absence might be misconstrued as a mark of disrespect, or of a petty hostility I am far from feeling. Be pleased, therefore, to dispose of me entirely in this matter."

Griffith reflected. "Sir," said he, "there is an old saying, 'let every tub stand on its own bottom.' The deceased wished you to follow him to the grave, and therefore I would on no account have you absent. Besides, now I think of it, there will

be less gossip about this unfortunate business if our neighbours see you under my roof; and treated with due consideration there, as you will be."

"I do not doubt that, sir, from so manly an adversary; and I shall do myself the honour to come." Such was Neville's reply. The rivals then saluted each other profoundly, and parted.

Hammersley and Rickards lingered behind their principals to settle their little bet about Kate's affections: and, by-the-by, they were indiscreet enough to discuss this delicate matter within a dozen yards of Tom Leicester: they forgot that "little pitchers have long ears."

Catherine Peyton rode slowly home, and thought it all over as she went; and worried herself finely. She was one that winced at notoriety; and she could not hope to escape it now. How the gossips would talk about her! they would say the gentlemen had fought about *her*; and she had parted them for love of one of them. And then the

gentlemen themselves! The strict neutrality she had endeavoured to maintain on Scutchemsee Nob, in order to make peace, would it not keep them both her suitors? She foresaw she should be pulled to pieces, and live in hot water, and be "the talk of the county."

There were but two ways out: she must marry one of them, and petition the other not to shoot him; or else she must take the veil, and so escape them both.

She preferred the latter alternative. She was more enthusiastic in religion than in any earthly thing: and now the angry passions of men thrust her the same road that her own devout mind had always drawn her.

As soon as she got home she sent a message to Father Francis, who drove her conscience, and begged him to come and advise her.

After that, she did the wisest thing, perhaps, she had done all day. Went to bed.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE sun was just setting when Catherine's maid came into her room and told her Father Francis was below. She sent down to say she counted on his sleeping at Peyton Hall; and she would come down to him in half an hour. She then ordered a refection to be prepared for him in her boudoir; and made her toilet with all reasonable speed, not to keep him waiting. Her face beamed with quiet complacency now: for the holy man's very presence in the house was a comfort to her.

Father Francis was a very stout muscular man, with a ruddy countenance: he never wore gloves, and you saw at once he was not a gentleman by

birth. He had a fine voice ; it was deep, mellow, and when he chose, sonorous. This, and his person, ample, but not obese, gave him great weight, especially with his female pupils. If he was not quite so much revered by the men, yet he was both respected and liked ; in fact, he had qualities that make men welcome in every situation : good humour, good sense, and tact. A good son of his Church, and early trained to let no occasion slip of advancing her interests.

I wish my readers could have seen the meeting between Catherine Peyton and this burly ecclesiastic. She came into the drawing-room with that imperious air and carriage which had made her so unpopular with her own sex ; and at the bare sight of Father Francis, drooped and bent in a moment as she walked ; and her whole body indicated a submissiveness, graceful, but rather abject : it was as if a young poplar should turn to a weeping willow in half a moment. Thus meta-

morphosed, the Beauty of Cumberland glided up to Francis, and sank almost to her knee before him, crossed her hands on her bosom, lowered her lovely head, and awaited his benediction.

The father made rapidly the sign of the cross over that thoroughbred head and golden hair, and blessed her business-like.

The hand of less employment hath the daintier sense.

*Shakespeare.*

Father Francis blessed so many of these pretty creatures every week, that he had long outgrown your fine romantic way of blessing a body. (We manage these things better in the theatre.) Then he lent her his hand to rise, and asked her in what she required his direction at present.

"In that which shall decide my whole life," said she.

Francis responded by a look of paternal interest.

"But first," murmured she, "let me confess to

you, and obtain absolution, if I may. Ah, father, my sins have been many since last confession."

"Be it so," said Father Francis, resignedly. "Confession is the best preface to Direction." And he seated himself with a certain change of manner, an easy assumption of authority.

"Nay, father," suggested the lady, "we shall be more private in my room."

"As you will, Mistress Catherine Peyton," said the priest, returning to his usual manner.

So then the fair penitent led her spiritual judge captive up another flight of stairs, and into her little boudoir. A cheerful wood fire crackled and flamed up the chimney, and a cloth had been laid on a side table: cold turkey and chine graced the board, and a huge glass magnum of purple Burgundy glowed and shone in the rays of the cheery fire.

Father Francis felt cosy at the sight; and at once accepted Kate's invitation to take some nourishment before entering on the labour of

listening to the catalogue of her crimes. "I fasted yesterday," he muttered : and the zeal with which he attacked the viands rendered the statement highly credible. He invited Kate to join him ; but she declined.

He returned more than once to the succulent meats, and washed all down with a pint of the fine old Burgundy, perfumed and purple. Meantime she of the laity sat looking into the fire with heavenly-minded eyes.

At last, with a gentle sigh of content, the ghostly father installed himself in an arm-chair, by the fire, and invited his penitent to begin.

She took a footstool and brought it to his side, so that in confessing her blacker vices she might be able to whisper them in his very ear. She kneeled on her little footstool, put her hands across her breast, and in this lowly attitude murmured softly after this fashion, with a contrite voice :—



"I have to accuse myself of many vices. Alas! in one short fortnight I have accumulated the wickedness of a life. I have committed the seven deadly sins. I have been guilty of Pride, Wrath, Envy, Disobedience, Immodesty, Vanity, Luxury, Fibs——"

"Gently, daughter," said the priest, quietly; "these terms are too general: give me instances. Let us begin with Wrath; ah! we are all prone to that."

The fair penitent sighed, and said: "Especially me. Example: I was angry beyond reason with my maid, Ruth. (She does comb my hair so uncouthly.) So then the other night, when I was in trouble, and most needed soothing, by being combed womanly, she gets thinking of Harry that helps in the stable, and she tears away at my hair. I started up and screamed out 'Oh, you clumsy thing! go currycomb my horse, and send that oaf your head is running on to handle my hair.' And

I told her my granddam would have whipped her well for it; but now-a-days mistresses were the only sufferers: we had lost the use of our hands, we are grown so squeamish; and I stamped like a fury, and said ‘Get you gone out of the room; and I hated the sight of her.’ And the poor girl went from me, crying, without a word—being a better Christian than her mistress; mea culpa! mea culpa!”

“Did you slap her?”

“Nay, father, not so bad as that.”

“Are you quite sure you did not slap her?” asked Francis, quietly.

“Nay. But I had a mind to. My heart slapped her if my hand forbore. Alas!”

“Had she hurt you?”

“That she did: but only my head. I hurt her heart; for the poor wench loves me dear; [the Lord knows for what.”

“Humph!—proceed to Pride.”

“Yes, father. — I do confess that I was greatly

puffed up with the praises of men. I was proud of the sorriest things ; of jumping a brook, when 'twas my horse jumped it, and had jumped it better with a fly on his back than the poor worm Me ; of my good looks, forgetting that God gave them me ; and besides I am no beauty when all is done ; it is all their flattery. And at my Lady Munster's dinner I pridefully walked out before Mistress Davies, the rich cheesemonger's wife, that is as proud of her money as I of my old blood (God forgive two fools !); which I had no right to do ; a maid to walk before a wife : and oh, father, I whispered the gentleman who led me out ; it was Mr. Neville——” Here the penitent put one hand before her face, and hesitated.

“ Well, daughter, half confession is no confession. You said to Mr. Neville——?”

“ I said, ‘ Nothing comes after cheese.’ ”

This revelation was made most dolefully.

"It was pert and unbecoming," said Father Francis, gravely; though a twinkle in his eye showed that he was not so profoundly shocked as his penitent appeared to be. "But go to graver matters. Immodesty, said you: I shall be very sorry if this is so. You did not use to be immodest."

"Well, father, I hope I have not altogether laid aside modesty; otherwise it would be time for me to die, let alone to confess; but sure it cannot be modest of me to ride after a gentleman and take him a letter. And then that was not enough: I heard of a duel, and what did I do but ride to Scutchemsee Nob, and interfere. What gentlewoman ever was so bold? I was not their wife you know; neither of them's."

"Humph!" said the priest, "I have already heard a whisper of this; but told to your credit. *Beati pacifici*: blessed are the peacemakers. You had better lay that matter before me by-and-by,

as your director. As your confessor, tell me why you accuse yourself of Luxury."

"Alas!" said the young lady, "scarce a day passes that I do not offend in *that* respect. Example: last Friday, dining abroad, the cooks sent up a dish of collops. Oh, father, they smelt so nice; and I had been a hunting. First I smelt them: and that I couldn't help. But then I forgot custodia oculorum; and I eyed them. And the next thing was, presently—somehow—two of 'em were on my plate."

"Very wrong," said Father Francis; "but that is a harsher term than I should have applied to this longing of a hungry woman for collops o' Friday. Pray what do you understand by that big word?"

"Why, you explained it yourself, in your last sermon. It means 'unruly and inordinate desires.' Example: Edith Hammersley told me I was mad to ride in scarlet, and me so fair and my hair so

light. 'Green or purple is your colour,' says she : and soon after this didn't I see in Stanhope town the loveliest piece of purple broadcloth ? Oh, father, it had a gloss like velvet, and the sun did so shine on it as it lay in the shop-window : it was fit for a king or a bishop : and I stood and gloated on it, and pined for it, and died for it, and down went the tenth commandment."

"Ah," said Francis, "the hearts of women are set on vanity. But tell me, these unruly affections of yours, are they ever fixed on persons of the other sex ?"

The fair sinner reflected. "On gentlemen !" said she. "Why, they come pestering one of their own accord. No, no ; I could do without *them* very well. What I sinfully pine for is meat on a Friday as sure as ever the day comes round ; and high-couraged horses to ride, and fine clothes to wear every day in the week : mea culpa ! mea culpa !"

Such being the dismal state of things, Francis slyly requested her to leave the seven deadly sins in peace, and go to her small offences: for he argued shrewdly enough that since her sins were peccadilloes, perhaps some of her peccadilloes might turn out to be sins.

“Small!” cried the culprit, turning red: “they are none of them small.” I really think she was jealous of her reputation as a sinner of high degree.

However she complied, and putting up her mouth, murmured a miscellaneous confession without end. The accents were soft and musical, like a babbling brook; and the sins, such as they were, poor things, rippled on in endless rotation.

Now nothing tends more to repose than a purling brook; and ere long that Bassoon, her confessor’s nose, let her know she had lost his ear.

She stopped indignant. But at that he in-

stantly awoke (*sublatâ causâ, tollitur effectus*), and addressed her thus with sudden dignity:—  
“My daughter, you will fast on Monday next, and say two Aves and a Credo. Absolvo te.

“And now,” said he, “as I am a practical man, let us get back from the imaginary world into the real. Speak to me at present as your director; and mind you must be serious now, and call things by their right names.”

Upon this Kate took a seat, and told her story, and showed him the difficulty she was in. She then reminded him that, notwithstanding her unfortunate itch for the seven deadly sins, she was a good Catholic, a zealous daughter of the Church: and she let him know her desire to retire from both lovers into a convent: and, so freed from the world and its temptations, yield up her soul entire to celestial peace and divine contemplation.

“Not so fast,” said the priest. “Even zeal is nought without obedience. If you could serve the



Church better than by going into a convent, would you be wilful?"

"Oh no, father. But how can I serve the Church better than by renouncing the world?"

"Perhaps by remaining in the world, as she herself does; and by making converts to the faith. You could hardly serve her worse than by going into a convent; for our convents are poor, and you have no means; you would be a charge. No, daughter, we want no poor nuns; we have enough of them. If you are, as I think, a true and zealous daughter of the Church, you must marry; and instil the true faith with all a mother's art, a mother's tenderness, into your children. Then the heir to your husband's estates will be a Catholic, and so the true faith get rooted in the soil."

"Alas!" said Catherine, "are we to look but to the worldly interests of the Church?"

"They are inseparable from her spiritual in-

terests here on earth: our souls are not more bound to our bodies."

Catherine was deeply mortified. "So the Church rejects me because I am poor," said she, with a sigh.

"The Church rejects you not, but only the Convent. No place is less fit for you. You have a high spirit, and high religious sentiments; both would be mortified and shocked in a nunnery. Think you that convent walls can shut out temptation? I know them better than you: they are strongholds of vanity, folly, tittle-tattle, and all the meanest vices of your sex. Nay, I forbid you to think of it: show me now your faith by your obedience."

"You are harsh to me, father," said Catherine, piteously.

"I am firm. You are one that need a tight hand, mistress. Come now, humility and obedience, these are the Christian graces that best

become your youth. Say, can the Church, through me its minister, count on these from you, or (suddenly letting loose his diapason) did you send for me to ask advice, and yet go your own way; hiding a high stomach and a wilful heart under a show of humility?"

Catherine looked at Father Francis with dismay. This was the first time that easy-going priest had shown her how impressive he could be. She was downright frightened; and said she hoped she knew better than defy her director; she laid her will at his feet; and would obey him like a child, as was her duty.

"Now I know my daughter again," said he, and gave her his horrible paw; the which she kissed very humbly: and that matter was settled to her entire dissatisfaction.

Soon after that they were both summoned to supper; but, as they went down, Kate's maid

drew her aside, and told her a young man wanted to speak to her.

“A young man !” screamed Kate. “Hang young men ! They have got me a fine scolding just now. Which is it, pray ?”

“He is a stranger to me.”

“Perhaps he comes with a message from some fool. You may bring him to me in the hall, and stay with us ; it may be a thief for ought I know.”

The maid soon reappeared, followed by Mr. Thomas Leicester.

That young worthy had lingered on Scutchemsee Nob, to extract the last drop of enjoyment from the situation, by setting up his hat at ten paces, and firing the gentlemen’s pistols at it. I despair of conveying to any rational reader the satisfaction, keen though brief, this afforded him : it was a new sensation ; gentlemen’s guns he had fired many, but duelling pistols not one till that bright hour.

He was now come to remind Catherine of his pecuniary claims. Luckily for him she was one who did not need to be reminded of her promises. "Oh, it is you, child," said she: "well, I'll be as good as my word." She then dismissed her maid, and went up-stairs, and soon returned with two guineas, a crown piece, and three shillings in her hand. "There," said she, smiling, "I am sorry for you, but that is all the money I have in the world."

The boy's eyes glittered at sight of the coin: he rammed the silver into his pocket with hungry rapidity. But he shook his head about the gold. "I'm afeard o' these," said he: and eyed them mistrustfully in his palm. "These be the friends that get you your throat cut o' dark nights: mistress, please keep 'em for me, and let me have a shilling now and then when I'm dry."

"Nay," said Kate, "but are you not afraid I shall spend your money, now I have none left of my own?"

Tom seemed quite struck with the reasonableness of this observation, and hesitated. However he concluded to risk it. "You don't look one of the sort to wrong a poor fellow," said he: "and besides you'll have brass to spare of your own before long, I know."

Kate opened her eyes. "Oh, indeed!" said she: "and pray how do you know that?"

Mr. Leicester favoured her with a knowing wink. He gave her a moment to digest this; and then said, almost in a whisper, "Hearkened the gentlefolks on Scutchemsee Nob, after you was gone home, mistress."

Kate was annoyed. "What! they must be prating as soon as one's back is turned. Talk of women's tongues! Now what did they say, I should like to know?"

"It was about the bet, ye know."

"A bet! Oh that is no affair of mine."

"Ay, but it is. Why, 'twas you they were

betting on: seems that old soger and Squire Hammersley had laid three guineas to one that you should let out which was your fancy of them two."

Kate's cheeks were red as fire now; but her delicacy overpowered her curiosity, and she would not put any more questions. To be sure, young Hopeful needed none; he was naturally a chatter-box, and he proceeded to tell her, that as soon as ever she was gone, Squire Hammersley took a guinea, and offered it to the old soldier, and told him he had won; and the old soldier pocketed it. But after that, somehow, Squire Hammersley let drop that Mr. Neville was the favourite. "Then," continued Mr. Leicester, "what does the old soger do, but pull out guinea again, and says he, 'You must have this back; bet is not won; for you do think 'tis Neville, now I do think 'tis Gaunt.' So then they fell to argufying, and talking a lot o' stuff."

“No doubt: the insolent meddlers! Can you remember any of their nonsense? not that it is worth remembering, I’ll be bound.”

“Let me see: well, Squire Hammersley he said you owned to dreaming of Squire Neville, and that was a sign of love, said he; and, besides, you sided with him against t’other. But the old soger he said you called Squire Gaunt ‘Griffith;’ and he built on that. Oh, and a said you changed the horses back to please our Squire. Says he, ‘You must look to what the lady did; never heed what she said. Why, their sweet lips was only made to kiss us, and deceive us,’ says that there old soger.”

“I’ll—I’ll—and what did you say, sir? For I suppose your tongue was not idle.”

“Oh, me; I never let ’em know I was hearken-  
ing; or they’d have ’greed in a moment for to give  
me a hiding. Besides I had no need to cudgel  
my brains: I’d only to ask you plump. You’ll



tell *me*, I know. Which is it, mistress? I'm for Gaunt, you know—in course. Alack, mistress," gabbled this voluble youth, "sure you won't be so hard as sack my squire, and him got a bullet in his carcase, for love of you, this day."

Kate started, and looked at him in surprise. "Oh!" said she, "a bullet! Did they fight again the moment they saw my back was turned? The cowards!" and she began to tremble.

"No, no," said Tom; "that was done before ever you came up. Don't ye remember that single shot while we were climbing the Nob? Well, 'twas Squire Gaunt got it in the arm that time."

"Oh!"

"But I say, wasn't our man game? never let out he was hit while you was there. But as soon as ever you was gone, they cut the bullet out of him; and I seen it."

"Ah!—ah!"

“Doctor takes out his knife ; precious sharp and shiny ’twas ; cuts into his arm with no more ado than if he was carving a pullet ; out squirts the blood, a good un.”

“Oh, no more ! no more ! You cruel boy ; how could you bear to look ?” And Kate hid her own face with both hands.

“Why, ’twasn’t *my* skin as was cut into. Squire Gaunt he never hollered ; a winced though, and ground his teeth ; but ’twas over in a minute, and the bullet in his hand. ‘That is for my wife,’ says he : ‘if ever I have one,’ and puts it in his pocket. Why, mistress, you be as white as your smock.”

“No, no. Did he faint, poor soul ?”

“Not he : what was there to faint about ?”

“Then why do I feel so sick, even to hear of it ?”

“Because you ha’n’t got no stomach,” said the boy, contemptuously. “Your courage is skin deep

I'm thinking. However, I'm glad you feel for our Squire, about the bullet : so now I hope you will wed with *him*, and sack Squire Neville. Then you and I shall be kind o' kin ; Squire Gaunt's feyther was my feyther. That makes you stare, mistress. Why, all the folk do know it. Look at this [here little mole on my forehead. Squire Gaunt have got the fellow to that." At this crisis of his argument, he suddenly caught a glimpse of his personal interest ; instantly he ceased his advocacy of Squire Gaunt, and became ludicrously impartial. "Well, mistress ; wed whichever you like," said he, with sublime indifference ; "only whichever you *do* wed, prithee speak a word to the gentleman, and get me to be his gamekeeper. I'd liever be your goodman's gamekeeper than King of England." He was proceeding with vast volubility to enumerate his qualifications for that confidential post, when the lady cut him short, and told him to go and get his supper in the

kitchen, for she was wanted elsewhere. He made a scrape, and clattered away with his hobnailed shoes.

Kate went to the hall window and opened it, and let the cold air blow over her face.

Her heart was touched, and her bosom filled with pity for her old sweetheart.

How hard she had been. She had sided with Neville against the wounded man. - And she thought how sadly and patiently he had submitted to her decision—and a bullet in his poor arm all the time.

The gentle bosom heaved, and heaved, and the tears began to run.

She entered the dining-room timidly, expecting some comment on her discourteous absence. Instead of that, both her father and her director rose respectfully, and received her with kind and affectionate looks. They then pressed her to eat

this, and that, and were remarkably attentive and kind. She could see she was deep in their good books. This pleased her; but she watched quietly, after the manner of her sex, to learn what it was all about. Nor was she left long in the dark. Remarks were made that hit her, though they were none of them addressed to her.

Father Francis delivered quite a little homily on "Obedience," and said how happy a thing it was when zeal, a virtue none too common in these degenerate days, was found tempered by humility, and subservient to ghostly counsel and authority.

Mr. Peyton dealt in no general topics of that kind; his discourse was secular: it ran upon Neville's Cross, Neville's Court, and the Baronetcy: and he showed Francis how and why this title must, sooner or later, come to George Neville, and the heirs of his body.

Francis joined in this topic for a while; but

speedily diverged into what might be called a collateral theme. He described to Kate a delightful spot on the Neville estate, where a nunnery might be built and endowed by any good Catholic lady having zeal, and influence with the owner of the estate, and with the lord-lieutenant of the county.

“It is three parts an island (for the river Wey curls round it lovingly); but backed by wooded slopes that keep off the north and east winds : a hidden and balmy place ; such as the forefathers of the Church did use to choose for their rustic abbeys, whose ruins still survive to remind us of the pious and glorious days gone by. Trout and salmon come swimming to the door : hawthorn and woodbine are as rife there as weeds be in some parts ; two broad oaks stand on turf like velvet, and ring with song-birds. A spot by nature sweet, calm, and holy : good for pious exercises and heavenly contemplation : there, methinks, if

it be God's will I should see old age, I would love to end my own days, at peace with Heaven and with all mankind."

Kate was much moved by this picture ; and her clasped hands and glistening eyes showed the glory and delight it would be to her to build a convent on so lovely a spot. But her words were vague. "How sweet ! how sweet !" was all she committed herself to. For, after what Tom Leicester had just told her, she hardly knew what to say, or what to think, or what to do : she felt she had become a mere puppet, first drawn one way, then another.

One thing appeared pretty clear to her now ; Father Francis did not mean her to choose between her two lovers ; he was good enough to relieve her of that difficulty by choosing for her. She was to marry Neville.

She retired to rest directly after supper ; for she was thoroughly worn out. And the moment she

rose to go, her father bounced up, and lighted the bed candle for her with novel fervour, and kissed her on the cheek, and said in her ear,—“Good night, my Lady Neville.”



## CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT with the day's excitement, and a sweet secluded convent in her soul, and a bullet in her bosom, and a ringing in her ear, that sounded mighty like "Lady Neville! Lady Neville! Lady Neville!" Kate spent a restless night, and woke with a bad headache.

She sent her maid to excuse her, on this score, from going to Bolton Hall. But she was informed in reply that the carriage had been got ready expressly for her; so she must be good enough to shake off disease and go: the air would do her a deal more good than lying abed.

Thereupon she dressed herself in her black silk

gown, and came down, looking pale and languid, but still quite lovely enough to discharge what in this age of cant I suppose we should call "her Mission;" *videlicet*, to set honest men by the ears.

At half-past eight o'clock the carriage came round to the front door. Its body, all glorious with the Peyton armorials, and with patches of rusty gilding, swung exceedingly loose on long leathern straps instead of springs, and the fore-wheels were a mile from the hind-wheels; more or less. A pretentious and horrible engine; drawn by four horses; only, two of them being ponies impaired the symmetry and majestic beauty of the pageant. Old Joe drove the wheelers; his boy rode the leaders; and every now and then got off and kicked them in the pits of their stomachs, or pierced them with hedge-stakes, to rouse their mettle. Thus encouraged and stimulated, they effected an average of four miles and a half per hour, notwithstanding the snow, and reached

Bolton just in time. At the lodge, Francis got out, and lay in ambush. But only for a time. He did not think it orthodox to be present at a religious ceremony of his Protestant friends: nor common-sense-o-dox to turn his back upon their dinner.

The carriage drew up at the hall door. It was wide open, and the hall lined with servants, male and female, in black. In the midst, between these two rows, stood Griffith Gaunt, bareheaded, to welcome the guests. His arm was in a sling. He had received all the others in the middle of the hall; but he came to the threshold to meet Kate and her father. He bowed low and respectfully; then gave his left hand to Kate to conduct her after the formal fashion of the day. The sight of his arm in a sling startled and affected her; and with him giving her his hand almost at the same moment, she pressed it, or indeed squeezed it nervously, and it was in her heart to say some-

thing kind and womanly: but her father was close behind, and she was afraid of saying something too kind, if she said anything at all; so Griffith only got a little gentle nervous pinch. But that was more than he expected, and sent a thrill of delight through him; his brown eyes replied with a volume, and holding her hand up in the air, as high as her ear, and keeping at an incredible distance, he led her solemnly to a room where the other ladies were, and left her there with a profound bow.

The Peytons were nearly the last persons expected; and soon after their arrival the funeral procession formed. This part was entirely arranged by the undertaker. The monstrous custom of forbidding ladies to follow their dead had not yet occurred even to the idiots of the nation; and Mr. Peyton and his daughter were placed in the second carriage. The first contained Griffith Gaunt alone, as head mourner. But the Peytons were not

alone; no other relation of the deceased being present, the undertaker put Mr. Neville with the Peytons, because he was heir to a baronetcy.

Kate was much startled, and astonished to see him come out into the hall. But, when he entered the carriage, she welcomed him warmly. "Oh, I am so glad to see you here," said she.

"Guess by that what my delight at meeting you must be," said he.

She blushed and turned it off. "I mean, that your coming here gives me good hopes there will be no more mischief." She then lowered her voice, and begged him on no account to tell her father of her ride to Scutchemsee Nob.

"Not a word," said George. He knew the advantage of sharing a secret with a fair lady. He proceeded to whisper something very warm in her ear: she listened to some of it; but then remonstrated, and said, "Are you not ashamed to go on so at a funeral? Oh, do pray leave com-

pliments a moment, and think of your latter end."

He took this suggestion, as indeed he did everything from her, in good part; and composed his visage into a decent gravity.

Soon after this they reached the church, and buried the deceased in his family vault.

People, who are not bereaved by the death, are always inclined to chatter coming home from a funeral. Kate now talked to Neville of her own accord, and asked him if he had spoken to his host. He said "Yes;" and, more than that, had come to a clear understanding with him. "We agreed that it was no use fighting for you. I said if either of us two was to kill the other, it does not follow you would wed the survivor."

"Me wed the wretch!" said Kate. "I should abhor him, and go into a convent in spite of you

all, and end my days praying for the murdered man's soul."

"Neither of us is worth all that," suggested Neville, with an accent of conviction.

"That is certain," replied the lady, drily; "so please not to do it."

He bade her set her mind at ease: they had both agreed to try and win her by peaceful arts.

"Then a pretty life mine will be."

"Well, I think it will, till you decide."

"I could easily decide, if it were not for giving pain to—somebody."

"Oh, you can't help that. My sweet mistress, you are not the first that has had to choose between two worthy men. For, in sooth, I have nothing to say against my rival neither. I know him better than I did: he is a very worthy gentleman, though he is damnably in my way."

"And you are a very noble one to say so."

"And you are one of those that make a man

noble: I feel that petty arts are not the way to win you, and I scorn them. Sweet Mistress Kate, I adore you. You are the best and noblest, as well as the loveliest of women."

"Oh, hush! Mr. Neville, I am a creature of clay; and you are another; and both of us coming home from a funeral. Do think of *that*."

Here they were interrupted by Mr. Peyton asking Kate to lend him a shilling for the groom. Kate replied aloud that she had left her purse at home, then whispered in his ear that she had not a shilling in the world: and this was strictly true; for her little all was Tom Leicester's now. With this they reached the Hall, and the coy Kate gave both Neville and Gaunt the slip, and got amongst her mates. There her tongue went as fast as her neighbours', though she had just come back from a funeral.

But soon the ladies and gentlemen were all invited to the reading of the Will.



And now chance, which had hitherto befriended Neville by throwing him into one carriage with Kate, gave Gaunt a turn. He found her a moment alone and near the embrasure of a window. He seized the opportunity and asked her might he say a word in her ear. "What a question!" said she, gaily; and the next moment they had the embrasure to themselves.

"Kate," said he, hurriedly, "in a few minutes, I suppose, I shall be master of this place. Now you told me once you would rather be an abbess or a nun than marry me."

"Did I?" said Kate. "What a sensible speech! But the worst of it is I'm never in the same mind long."

"Well," replied Griffith, "I think of all that falls from your lips; and your will is mine; only for pity's sake do not wed any man but me. You have known me so long; why, you know the worst of me by this time: and you have only seen the outside of *him*."

“Detraction ! is that what you wanted to say to me ?” asked Kate, freezing suddenly.

“Nay, nay ; it was about the abbey. I find you can be an abbess without going and shutting yourself up and breaking one’s heart. The way is, you build a convent in Ireland, and endow it ; and then you send a nun over to govern it under you. Bless your heart, you can do anything with money ; and I shall have money enough before the day is over. To be sure I *did* intend to build a kennel and keep harriers ; and you know that costs a good penny : but we couldn’t manage a kennel and an abbey too ; so now down goes the English kennel and up goes the Irish abbey.”

“But you are a Protestant gentleman. You could not found a nunnery.”

“But my wife could. Whose business is it what she does with her money ?”

“With your money, you mean.”

“Nay with hers, when I give it her with all my heart.”

“Well, you astonish me,” said Kate, thoughtfully. “Tell me, now, who put it into your head to bribe a poor girl in this abominable way?”

“Who put it into my head?” said Griffith, looking rather puzzled: “why I suppose my heart put it into my head.”

Kate smiled very sweetly at this answer, and a wild hope thrilled through Griffith that perhaps she might be brought to terms.

But at this crisis the lawyer from London was announced, and Griffith, as master of the house, was obliged to seat the company. He looked bitterly disappointed at the interruption, but put a good face on it, and had more chairs in, and saw them all seated, beginning with Kate and the other ladies.

The room was spacious, and the entire company sat in the form of a horse-shoe.

The London solicitor was introduced by Griffith and bowed in a short, business-like way; seated himself in the horse-shoe aforesaid, and began to read the will aloud.

It was a lengthy document, and there is nothing to be gained by repeating every line of it. I pick out a clause here and there.

“I, Septimus Charlton, of Hernshaw Castle and Bolton Grange, in the county of Cumberland, Esquire, being of sound mind, memory, and understanding—thanks be to God—do make this my last will and testament as follows:—First I commit my soul to God who gave it, and my body to the earth from which it came. I desire my executors to discharge my funeral and testamentary expenses, my just debts, and the legacies hereinafter bequeathed, out of my personal estate.”

Then followed several legacies of fifty and one

hundred guineas. Then several small legacies ; such as the following :

“To my friend Edward Peyton, of Peyton Hall, Esq., ten guineas to buy a mourning ring.

“To the worshipful gentlemen and ladies who shall follow my body to the grave, ten guineas each, to buy a mourning ring.”

“To my wife’s cousin, Griffith Gaunt, I give and bequeath the sum of two thousand pounds, the same to be paid to him within one calendar month from the date of my decease.

“And as to all my messuages, or tenements, farms, lands, hereditaments, and real estate, of what nature or what kind soever, and wheresoever situate, together with all my monies, mortgages, chattels, furniture, plate, pictures, wine, liquors, horses, carriages, stock, and all the rest, residue, and remainder of my personal estate and effects whatsoever (after the payment of the debts and

legacies hereinbefore mentioned), I give, devise, and bequeath the same to my cousin, Catherine Peyton, daughter of Edward Peyton, Esq., of Peyton Hall, in the county of Cumberland, her heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns for ever."

When the lawyer read out this unexpected blow, the whole company turned in their seats and looked amazed at her, who, in a second and a sentence, was turned before their eyes from the poorest girl in Cumberland to an heiress in her own right, and proprietor of the house they sat in, the chairs they sat on, and the lawn they looked out at.

Ay, we turn to the rising sun: very few looked at Griffith Gaunt to see how he took his mistress's good fortune, that was his calamity: yet his face was a book full of strange matter. At first a flash of loving joy crossed his countenance; but this gave way immediately to a haggard look, and that to a glare of despair.

As for the lady, she cast one deprecating glance, swifter than lightning, at him she had disinherited; and then she turned her face to marble. In vain did curious looks explore her to detect the delight such a stroke of fortune would have given to themselves. Faulty, but great of soul, and on her guard against the piercing eyes of her own sex, she sat sedate, and received her change of fortune with every appearance of cool composure and exalted indifference: and, as for her dreamy eyes, they seemed thinking of Heaven or something almost as many miles away from money and land.

But the lawyer had not stopped a moment to see how people took it, he had gone steadily on through the usual formal clauses: and now he brought his monotonous voice to an end, and added in the same breath, but in a natural and cheerful tone, "Madam, I wish you joy."

This operated like a signal: the company ex-

ploded in a body ; and then they all came about the heiress, and congratulated her in turn. She curtsied politely though somewhat coldly, but said not a word in reply, till the disappointed one spoke to her.

He hung back at first: to understand his feelings it must be remembered that in this view of things Kate gained nothing by this bequest compared with what he lost. As his wife, she would have been mistress of Bolton Hall, etc. But now she was placed too far above him. Sick at heart, he stood aloof while they all paid their court to her. But, by-and-by, he felt it would look base and hostile if he alone said nothing ; so he came forward, struggling visibly for composure and manly fortitude.

The situation was piquant, and the ladies tongues stopped in a moment, and they were all eyes and ears.



## CHAPTER IX.

GRIFFITH, with an effort he had not the skill to hide, stammered out, "Mistress Kate, I do wish you joy." Then with sudden and touching earnestness, "Never did good fortune light on one so worthy of it."

"Thank you, Griffith," replied Kate, softly. (She had called him 'Mr. Gaunt' in public till now.) "But money and lands do not always bring content. I think I was happier a minute ago than I feel now," said she, quietly.

The blood rushed into Griffith's face at this; for a minute ago might mean when he and she were talking almost like lovers about to wed.

He was so overcome by this, he turned on his heel, and retreated hastily to hide his emotion, and regain, if possible, composure to play his part of host in the house that was his no longer.

Kate herself soon after retired, nominally to make her toilet before dinner; but really to escape the public; and think it all over.

The news of her advancement had spread like wildfire: she was waylaid at the very door by the housekeeper, who insisted on showing her her house. "Nay, never mind the house," said Kate: "just show me one room where I can wash my face and do my hair."

Mrs. Hill conducted her to the best bedroom: it was lined with tapestry, and all the colours flown; the curtains were a deadish yellow.

"Lud! here's a coloured room to show *me* into," said the blonde Kate: "and a black grate, too. Why not take me out o' doors and bid me wash in the snow?"

“Alack, mistress,” said the woman, feeling very uneasy, “we had no orders from Mr. Gaunt to light fires *up* stairs.”

“Oh, if you wait for gentlemen’s orders to make your house fit to live in! You knew there were a dozen ladies coming, yet you were not woman enough to light them fires. Come, take me to your own bedroom.”

The woman turned red: “Mine is but a small room, my lady,” she stammered.

“But there’s a fire in it,” said Kate, spitefully. “You servants don’t wait for gentlemen’s orders, to take care of yourselves.”

Mrs. Hill said to herself, “I’m to leave; that is flat.” However, she led the way down a passage, and opened the door of a pleasant little room in a square turret: a large bay window occupied one whole side of the room, and made it inexpressibly bright and cheerful, though rather hot and stuffy; a clear coal fire burnt in the grate:

“Ah!” said Kate, “how nice. Please open those little windows every one. I suppose you have sworn never to let wholesome air into a room. Thank you: now go and forget every cross word I have said to you—I am out of sorts, and nervous, and irritable. There, run away, my good soul, and light fires in every room; and don’t you let a creature come near me, or you and I shall quarrel downright.”

Mrs. Hill beat a hasty retreat. Kate locked the door and threw herself backwards on the bed, with such a weary recklessness and abandon, as if she was throwing herself into the sea, to end all her trouble—and burst out crying.

It was one thing to refuse to marry her old sweetheart; it was another to take his property and reduce him to poverty. But here was she doing both, and going to be persuaded to marry Neville, and swell his wealth with the very possessions she had taken from Griffith; and him

wounded into the bargain for love of her. It was really too cruel. It was an accumulation of different cruelties. Her bosom revolted: she was agitated, perplexed, irritated, unhappy, and all in a tumult: and, although she had but one fit of crying,—to the naked eye,—yet a person of her own sex would have seen that at one moment she was crying from agitated nerves, at another from worry, and at the next from pity, and then from grief.

In short she had a good long, hearty, multi-form cry; and it relieved her swelling heart so far, that she felt able to go down now, and hide her feelings, one and all, from friend and foe; to do which was, unfortunately, a part of her nature.

She rose and plunged her face into cold water, and then smoothed her hair.

Now, as she stood at the glass, two familiar voices came in through the open window, and arrested her attention directly. It was her father

conversing with Griffith Gaunt. Kate pricked up her quick ears and listened, with her back hair in her hand. She caught the subject of their talk, only now and then she missed a word or two.

Mr. Peyton was speaking rather kindly to Griffith, and telling him he was as sorry for his disappointment as any father could be whose daughter had just come into a fortune. But then he went on and rather spoiled this by asking Griffith bluntly what on earth had ever made him think Mr. Charlton intended to leave him Bolton and Hernshaw.

Griffith replied, with manifest agitation, that Mr. Charlton had repeatedly told him he was to be his heir. "Not," said Griffith, "that he meant to wrong Mistress Kate, neither: poor old man, he always thought she and I should be one."

"Ah! well," said Squire Peyton, coolly, "there is an end of all that now."

At this observation Kate glided to the window, and laid her cheek on the sill to listen more closely.

But Griffith made no reply.

Mr. Peyton seemed dissatisfied [at his silence, and being a person who, notwithstanding a certain superficial good-nature, saw his own side of a question very big, and his neighbour's very little, he was harder than perhaps he intended to be.

"Why, Master Gaunt," said he, "surely you would not follow my daughter now; to feed upon a woman's bread. Come, be a man; and, if you are the girl's friend, don't stand in her light. You know she can wed your betters, and clap Bolton Hall on to Neville's Court. No doubt it is a disappointment to *you*: but what can't be cured must be endured; pluck up a bit of courage, and turn your heart another way; and then I shall always be a good friend to you, and my doors open to you come when you will."

Griffith made no reply. Kate strained her ears, but could not hear a syllable. A tremor ran through her. She was in distance farther from Griffith than her father was; but superior intelligence provided her with a bridge from her window to her old servant's mind. And now she felt that this great silence was the silence of despair.

But the Squire pressed him for a definite answer; and finally insisted on one. "Come, don't be sulky," said he; "I'm her father: give me an answer, ay or no."

Then Kate heard a violent sigh, and out rushed a torrent of words that each seemed tinged with blood from the unfortunate speaker's heart. "Old man," he almost shrieked, "what did I ever do to you that you torment me so? Sure you were born without bowels. Beggared but an hour ago, and now you must come and tell me I have lost *her* by losing house and lands! D'ye think I need to be *told* it? She was too far above



me before, and now she is gone quite out of my reach. But why come and fling it in my face? Can't you give a poor undone man one hour to draw his breath in trouble? And, when you know I have got to play the host this bitter day, and smile, and smirk, and make you all merry, with my heart breaking. Oh Christ, look down and pity me, for men are made of stone! Well, then, no; I will not, I cannot, say the word, to give her up. *She* will discharge *me*, and then I'll fly the country, and never trouble you more. And to think that one little hour ago she was so kind, and I was so happy: Ah, sir, if you were born of a woman, have a little pity, and don't speak to me of her at all one way or other. What are you afraid of? I am a gentleman and a man, though sore my trouble: I shall not run after the lady of Bolton Hall. Why, sir, I have ordered the servants to set her chair in the middle of the table, where I shall not be able to

“speak to her, or even see her. Indeed I dare not look at her: for I must be merry. Merry! My arm it worries me, my head it aches, my heart is sick to death. Man! man! show me some little grace, and do not torture me more than flesh and blood can bear.”

“You are mad, young sir,” said the Squire, sternly, “and want locking up on bread and water for a month.”

“I *am* almost mad,” said Griffith, humbly. “But if you would only let me alone, and not tear my heart out of my body, I could hide my agony from the whole pack of ye, and go through my part like a man. I wish I was lying where I laid my only friend this afternoon.”

“Oh! I don’t want to speak to you,” said Peyton, angrily; “and, by the same token, don’t you speak to my daughter any more.”

“Well, sir, if she speaks to me I shall be sure to speak to her, without asking your leave or any

man's. But I will not force myself upon the lady of Bolton Hall; don't you think it. Only for God's sake let me alone. I want to be by myself." And, with this, he hurried away, unable to bear it any more.

Peyton gave a hostile and contemptuous snort, and also turned on his heel, and went off in the opposite direction. The effect of this dialogue on the listener was not to melt, but exasperate her. Perhaps she had just cried away her stock of tenderness. At any rate, she rose from her ambush a very basilisk; her eyes, usually so languid, flashed fire, and her forehead was red with indignation. She bit her lip, and clenched her hands, and her little foot beat the ground swiftly.

She was still in this state when a timid tap came to the door, and Mrs. Hill asked her pardon, but dinner was ready, and the ladies and gentlemen all a waiting for her to sit down.

This reminded Kate she was the mistress of the house. She answered civilly she would be down immediately. She then took a last look in the glass ; and her own face startled her.

“No,” she thought ; “they shall none of them know nor guess what I feel.” And she stood before the glass and deliberately extracted all emotion from her countenance, and by way of preparation screwed on a spiteful smile.

When she had got her face to her mind, she went down stairs.

The gentlemen awaited her with impatience, the ladies with curiosity, to see how she would comport herself in her new situation. She entered, made a formal curtsy, and was conducted to her seat by Mr. Gaunt. He placed her in the middle of the table. “I play the host for this one day,” said he, with some dignity ; and took the bottom of the table himself.

Mr. Hammersley was to have sat on Kate’s left,

but the sly Neville persuaded him to change, and so got next to his inamorata : opposite to her sat her father, Major Rickards, and others unknown to fame.

Neville was in high spirits. He had the good taste to try and hide his satisfaction at the fatal blow his rival had received, and he entirely avoided the topic ; but Kate saw at once, by his demure complacency, he was delighted at the turn things had taken ; and he gained nothing by it : he found her a changed girl. Cold monosyllables were all he could extract from her. He returned to the charge a hundred times with indomitable gallantry, but it was no use. Cold, haughty, sullen !

Her other neighbour fared little better ; and in short the lady of the house made a vile impression. She was an iceberg : a beautiful kill-joy : a wet blanket of charming texture.

And presently Nature began to co-operate with

her: long before sunset it grew prodigiously dark; and the cause was soon revealed by a fall of snow in flakes as large as a biscuit. A shiver ran through the people; and old Peyton blurted out, "I shall not go home to-night." Then he bawled across the table to his daughter: "*You* are at home. We will stay and take possession."

"Oh, papa!" said Kate, reddening with disgust.

But if dulness reigned around the lady of the house, it was not so everywhere: loud bursts of merriment were heard at the bottom of the table. Kate glanced that way in some surprise, and found it was Griffith making the company merry; Griffith of all people:

The laughter broke out at short intervals, and by-and-by became uproarious and constant. At last she looked at Neville inquiringly.

"Our worthy host is setting us an example of conviviality," said he. "He is getting drunk."

"Oh, I hope not," said Kate. "Has he no

friend to tell him not to make a fool of himself?"

"You take a great interest in him," said Neville, bitterly.

"Of course I do. Pray do you desert your friends when ill luck falls on them?"

"Nay, Mistress Kate, I hope not."

"You only triumph over the misfortunes of your enemies, eh?" said the stinging beauty.

"Not even that. And, as for Mr. Gaunt, I am not his enemy."

"Oh no, of course not. You are his best friend. Witness his arm at this moment."

"I am his rival; but not his enemy: I'll give you a proof." Then he lowered his voice, and said in her ear: "You are grieved at his losing Bolton; and, as you are very generous, and noble-minded, you are all the more grieved because his loss is your gain." (Kate blushed at this shrewd hit.) Neville went on: "You don't like him

well enough to marry him ; and, since you cannot make him happy, it hurts your good heart to make him poor."

"It is you for reading a lady's heart," said Kate, ironically.

George proceeded steadily. "I'll show you an easy way out of this dilemma."

"Thank you," said Kate, rather insolently.

"Give Mr. Gaunt Bolton and Hernshaw, and give me—your hand."

Kate turned and looked at him with surprise : she saw by his eye it was no jest. For all that, she effected to take it as one. "That would be long and short division," said she : but her voice faltered in saying it.

"So it would," replied George, coolly ; "for Bolton and Hernshaw both are not worth one finger of that hand I ask of you. But the value of things lies in the mind that weighs 'em. Mr. Gaunt, you see, values Bolton and Hernshaw



very highly ; why, he is in despair at losing them. Look at him ; he is getting rid of his reason before your very eyes, to drown his disappointment."

"Oh, that is it, is it?" And, strange to say, she looked rather relieved.

"That is it, believe me : it is a way we men have. But, as I was saying, *I* don't care one straw for Bolton and Hernshaw. It is *you* I love ; not your land nor your house, but your sweet self : so give me that, and let the lawyers make over this famous house and lands to Mr. Gaunt. His antagonist I have been in the field, and his rival I am and must be, but not his enemy, you see, and not his ill-wisher."

Kate was softened a little. "This is all mighty romantic," said she, "and very like a preux chevalier, as you are ; but you know very well he would fling land and house in your face if you offered them him on these terms."

"Ay, in my face if I offered them ; but not in yours if you."

"I am sure he would, all the same."

"Try him."

"What is the use?"

"Try him."

Kate showed symptoms of uneasiness. "Well, I will," said she, stoutly. "No, that I will not. You begin by bribing me ; and then you would set me to bribe him."

"It is the only way to make two honest men happy."

"If I thought that?"

"You know it. Try him."

"And suppose he says nay?"

"Then we shall be no worse than we are."

"And suppose he says ay?"

"Then he will wed Bolton Hall and Hernshaw ; and the pearl of England will wed me."

"I have a great mind to take you at your

word," said Kate ; "but no ; it is really too indelicate."

George Neville fixed his eyes on her. "Are you not deceiving yourself?" said he. "Do you not like Mr. Gaunt better than you think? I begin to fear you dare not put him to this test : you fear his love would not stand it?"

Kate coloured high, and tossed her head proudly.

"How shrewd you gentlemen are," she said. "Much you know of a lady's heart. Now the truth is I don't know what might happen were I to do what you bid me. Nay, I'm wiser than you would have me, and I'll pity Mr. Gaunt at a safe distance, if you please, sir."

Neville bowed gravely : he felt sure this was a plausible evasion ; and that she really was afraid to apply his test to his rival's love.

So now for the first time he became silent and reserved by her side. The change was noticed by

Father Francis, and he fixed a grave remonstrating glance on Kate. She received it, understood it, affected not to notice it, and acted upon it.

Drive a donkey too hard; it kicks.

Drive a man too hard; it hits.

Drive a woman too hard; it cajoles.

Now amongst them they had driven Kate Peyton too hard; so she secretly formed a bold resolution; and, this done, her whole manner changed for the better. She turned to Neville, and flattered and fascinated him. The most feline of her sex could scarcely equal her calinerie on this occasion. But she did not confine her fascination to him. She broke out, *pro bono publico*, like the sun in April, with quips and cranks and dimpled smiles, and made everybody near her quite forget her late hauteur and coldness, and bask in this sunny sweet hostess. When the charm was at its height, the Siren cast a seeming merry glance at Griffith, and said to a lady opposite, "Methinks some of

the gentlemen will be glad to be rid of us," and so carried the ladies off to the drawing-room.

There, her first act was to dismiss her smiles without ceremony, and her second was to sit down and write four lines to the gentleman at the head of the dining-table.

And he was as drunk as a fiddler.

## CHAPTER X.

GRIFFITH'S friends laughed <sup>heartily</sup> with him while he was getting drunk, and, when he had got drunk, they laughed still louder, only at him.

They "knocked him down" for a song; and he sang a rather Anacreontic one very melodiously, and so loud that certain of the servants, listening outside, derived great delectation from it; and Neville applauded ironically.

Soon after, they "knocked him down" for a story; and, as it requires more brains to tell a story than to sing a song, the poor butt made an ass of himself: he maundered and wandered, and stopped, and went on, and <sup>lost</sup> one thread and

took up and another, and got into a perfect maze. And, while he was thus entangled, a servant came in and brought him a note, and put it in his hand. The unhappy narrator received it with a sapient nod, but was too polite or else too stupid to open it ; so closed his fingers on it and went maundering on till his story trickled into the sand of the desert, and somehow ceased ; for it could not be said to end, being a thing without head or tail.

He sat down amidst derisive cheers. About five minutes afterwards, in some intermittent flash of reason, he found he had got hold of something. He opened his hand, and lo, a note ! On this he chuckled unreasonably, and distributed sage, cunning, winks around, as if he by special ingenuity had caught a nightingale, or the like ; then with sudden hauteur and gravity proceeded to examine his prize.

But he knew the handwriting at once, and it

gave him a galvanic shock that half sobered him for the moment.

He opened the note and spelled it with great difficulty ; it was beautifully written in long, clear letters ; but then those letters kept dancing so.

“ I much desire to speak to you before ’tis too late ; but can think of no way save one ; I lie in the turreted room : come under my window at nine of the clock ; and prithee come sober, if you respect yourself, or

“ KATE.”

Griffith put the note in his pocket, and tried to think. But he could not think to much purpose. Then this made him suspect he was drunk. Then he tried to be sober ; but he found he could not. He sat in a sort of stupid agony, with Love and Drink battling for his brain. It was piteous to see the poor fool’s struggles to regain the reason he



had so madly parted with. He could not do it; and, when he found that, he took up a finger-glass and gravely poured the contents upon his head.

At this there was a burst of laughter.

This irritated Mr. Gaunt, and, with that rapid change of sentiments which marks the sober savage and the drunken European, he offered to fight a gentleman he had been hitherto holding up to the company as his best friend. But his best friend (a very distant acquaintance) was by this time as tipsy as himself, and offered a piteous disclaimer, mingled with tears; and these maudlin drops so affected Griffith that he flung his one available arm round his best friend's head, and wept in turn; and down went both their lachrymose, empty noddles on the table. Griffith's remained there; but his best friend extricated himself, and, shaking his skull, said, dolefully, "He is very drunk." This notable discovery,

coming from such a quarter, caused considerable merriment.

“Let him alone,” said an old toper; and Griffith remained a good hour with his head on the table. Meantime the other gentlemen soon put it out of their power to ridicule him on the score of intoxication.

Griffith, keeping quiet, got a little better, and suddenly started up with a notion he was to go to Kate this very moment. He muttered an excuse, and staggered to a glass door that led to the lawn; he opened this door, and rushed out into the open air. He thought it would set him all right: but, instead of that, it made him so much worse that resently his legs came to a misunderstanding, and he measured his length on the ground, and could not get up again, but kept slipping down.

Upon this he groaned and lay quiet.

Now there was a foot of snow on the ground, and it melted about Griffith's hot temples and

flushed face, and mightily refreshed and revived him.

He sat up and kissed Kate's letter, and Love began to get the upper hand of Liquor a little.

Finally he got up, and half strutted, half staggered to the turret, and stood under Kate's window.

The turret was covered with luxuriant ivy, and that ivy with snow. So the glass of the window was set in a massive frame of winter; but a bright fire burned inside the room, and this set the panes all aflame. It was cheery and glorious to see the window glow like a sheet of transparent fire in its deep frame of snow; but Griffith could not appreciate all that. He stood there a sorrowful man. The wine he had taken to drown his despair had lost its stimulating effect, and had given him a heavy head, but left him his sick heart.

He stood and puzzled his drowsy faculties why Kate had sent for him. Was it to bid him good-

bye for ever ; or to lessen his misery by telling him she would not marry another ? He soon gave up cudgelling his enfeebled brains ; Kate was a superior being to him, and often said things, and did things, that surprised him. She had sent for him, and that was enough ; he should see her, and speak to her once more, at all events. He stood, alternately nodding and looking up at her glowing room, and longing for its owner to appear. But, as Bacchus had inspired him to mistake eight o'clock for nine, and as she was not a votary of Bacchus, she did not appear ; and he stood there till he began to shiver.

The shadow of a female passed along the wall, and Griffith gave a great start. Then he heard the fire poked. Soon after he saw the shadow again ; but it had a large servant's cap on ; so his heart had beaten high for Mary or Susan. He hung his head disappointed ; and, holding on by the ivy, fell a nodding again.

By-and-by one of the little casements was opened softly. He looked up, and there was the right face peering out.

Oh, what a picture she was in the moonlight and the firelight! They both fought for that fair head, and each got a share of it: the full moon's silvery beams shone on her rose-like cheeks and lilyfied them a shade, and lit her great grey eyes and made them gleam astoundingly; but the ruby firelight rushed at her from behind, and flowed over her golden hair, and reddened and glorified it till it seemed more than mortal. And all this in a very picture-frame of snow.

Imagine, then, how sweet and glorious she glowed on him who loved her, and who looked at her perhaps for the last time.

The sight did wonders to clear his head; he stood open-mouthed, with his heart beating. She looked him all over a moment. "Ah!" said she. Then, quietly, "I am so glad you are come."

Then, kindly and regretfully, "How pale you look! you are unhappy."

This greeting, so gentle and kind, overpowered Griffith. His heart was too full to speak.

Kate waited a moment; and then, as he did not reply to her, she began to plead to him. "I hope you are not angry with *me*," she said. "*I* did not want him to leave me your estates. I would not rob you of them for the world, if I had my way."

"Angry with you!" said Griffith. "I'm not such a villain. Mr. Charlton did the right thing, and——" He could say no more.

"I do not think so," said Kate. "But don't you fret: all shall be settled to your satisfaction. I cannot quite love you, but I have a sincere affection for you; and so I ought. Cheer up, dear Griffith; don't you be down-hearted about what has happened to-day."

Griffith smiled. "I don't feel unhappy," he said; "I did feel as if my heart was broken. But

then you seemed parted from me. Now we are together I feel as happy as ever. Mistress, don't you ever shut that window and leave me in the dark again. Let me stand and look at your sweet face all night, and I shall be the happiest man in Cumberland."

"Ay," said Kate, blushing at his ardour; "happy for a single night; but when I go away you will be in the dumps again, and perhaps get tipsy; as if that could mend matters. Nay, I must set your happiness on stronger legs than that. Do you know I have got permission to undo this cruel will, and let you have Bolton Hall and Hernshaw again?"

Griffith looked pleased, but rather puzzled.

Kate went on, but not so glibly now. "However," said she, a little nervously, "there is one condition to it that will cost us both some pain. If you consent to accept these two estates from me, who don't value them one straw, why then——"

She hesitated.

“ Well, what ? ” he gasped.

“ Why, then, my poor Griffith, we shall be bound in honour,—you and I,—not to meet for some months : perhaps for a whole year : in one word—do not hate me—not till you can bear to see me—another—man’s—wife.”

The murder being out, she hid her face in her hands directly, and in that attitude awaited his reply.

Griffith stood petrified a moment ; and I don’t think his intellects were even yet quite clear enough to take it all in at once. But at last he did comprehend it, and, when he did, he just uttered a loud cry of agony, and then turned his back on her without a word.

Man does not speak by words alone. A mute glance of reproach has ere now pierced the heart a tirade would have left untouched ; and even an inarticulate cry may utter volumes.



Such an eloquent cry was that with which Griffith Gaunt turned his back upon the angelical face he adored, and the soft persuasive tongue. There was agony, there was shame, there was wrath, all in that one ejaculation.

It frightened Kate. She called him back. "Don't leave me so," she said. "I know I have affronted you; but I meant all for the best. Do not let us part in anger."

At this Griffith returned in violent agitation. "It is your fault for making me speak," he cried "I was going away without a word, as a man should, that is insulted by a woman. You heartless girl! What! you bid me sell you to that man for two dirty farms! Oh, well you know Bolton and Hernshaw were but the steps by which I hoped to climb to you: and now you tell me to part with you, and take those miserable acres instead of my darling. Ah! mistress, you have never loved: or you would hate yourself and

despise yourself for what you have done. Love! if you had known what that word means, you couldn't look in my face and stab me to the heart like this. God forgive you! And sure I hope he will; for after all, it is not *your* fault that you were born without a heart. WHY, KATE, YOU ARE CRYING."

## CHAPTER XI.

"CRYING!" said Kate. "I could cry my eyes out to think what I have done; but it is not my fault: they egged me on. I knew you would fling those two miserable things in my face if I did, and I said so; but they would be wiser than me, and insist on my putting you to the proof."

"They? Who is they?"

"No matter. Whoever it was they will gain nothing by it, and you will lose nothing. Ah, Griffith, I am so ashamed of myself—and so proud of you."

"They?" repeated Griffith, suspiciously. "Who is this they?"

“What does that matter, so long as it was not Me? Are you going to be jealous again? Let us talk of you and me, and never mind who *them* is. You have rejected my proposal with just scorn; so now let me hear yours; for we must agree on something this very night. Tell me, now, what can I say or do to make you happy?”

Griffith was sore puzzled. “Alas! sweet Kate,” said he, “I don’t know what you can do for me now, except stay single for my sake.”

“I should like nothing better,” replied Kate, warmly; “but unfortunately they won’t let me do that. Father Francis will be at me to-morrow, and insist on my marrying Mr. Neville.”

“But you will refuse.”

“I would, if I could but find a good excuse.”

“Excuse? why, say you don’t love him.”

“Oh, they won’t allow that for a reason.”

“Then I am undone,” sighed Griffith.

“No, no, you are not ; if I could be brought to pretend I love somebody else. And really, if I don’t quite love you, I like you too well to let you be unhappy. Besides, I cannot bear to rob you of these unlucky farms : I think there is nothing I would not do rather than that. I think—I would rather—do—something very silly indeed. But I suppose you don’t want me to do that now ? Why don’t you answer me ? Why don’t you say something ? Are you drunk, sir, as they pretend ? or are you asleep ? Oh, I can’t speak any plainer : this is intolerable. Mr. Gaunt, I’m going to shut the window.”

Griffith got alarmed, and it sharpened his wits. “Kate, Kate !” he cried, “what do you mean ? am I in a dream ? would you marry poor me after all ?”

“How on earth can I tell, till I am asked ?” inquired Kate, with an air of childlike innocence, and inspecting the stars attentively.

“Kate, will you marry me?” said Griffith, all in a flutter.

“Of course I will—if you will let me,” replied Kate, coolly, but rather tenderly, too.

Griffith burst into raptures; Kate listened to them with a complacent smile; then delivered herself after this fashion:—“You have very little to thank me for, dear Griffith. I don’t exactly downright love you; but I could not rob you of those unlucky farms, and you refuse to take them back any way but this; so what can I do? And then, for all I don’t love you, I find I am always unhappy if you are unhappy, and happy when you are happy; so it comes pretty much to the same thing. I declare I am sick of giving you pain, and a little sick of crying in consequence. There, I have cried more in the last fortnight than in all my life before, and you know nothing spoils one’s beauty like crying: and then you are so good, and kind, and true, and brave; and everybody is so

unjust, and so unkind to you ; papa and all. You were quite in the right about the duel, dear ; he *is* an impudent puppy ; and I threw dust in your eyes, and made you own you were in the wrong ; and it was a great shame of me ; but it was because I liked you best. I could take liberties with *you*, dear. And you are wounded for me ; and now I have disinherited you ; oh, I can't bear it, and I won't. My heart yearns for you ; bleeds for you. I would rather die than you should be unhappy ; I would rather follow you in rags round the world than marry a prince and make you wretched. Yes, dear, I am yours. Make me your wife ; and then some day I daresay I shall love you as I ought."

She had never showed her heart to him like this before ; and now it overpowered him. So, being also a little under vinous influence, he stammered out something, and then fairly blubbered with joy. Then what does Kate do, but cry for company.

Presently, to her surprise, he was half way up the turret, coming to her.

“Oh, take care ! take care !” she cried. “You’ll break your neck.”

“Nay,” cried he, “I must come at you, if I die for it.”

The turret was ornamented from top to bottom with short ledges consisting of half bricks. This ledge, shallow as it was, gave a slight foothold, insufficient in itself, but he grasped the strong branches of the ivy with a powerful hand ; and so between the two contrived to get up and hang himself out close to her.

“Sweet mistress,” said he, “put out your hand to me ; for I can’t take it against your will this time ; I have got but one arm.”

But this she declined. “No, no,” said she ; “you do nothing but torment and terrify me,—there.” And so, gave it him ; and he mumbled it.

This last feat won her quite. She thought no



other man could have got to her there, with two arms, and Griffith had done it with one. She said; to herself, "How he loves me! more than his own neck." And then she thought, "I shall be wife to a strong man; that is one comfort."

In this softened mood she asked him demurely, would he take a friend's advice.

"If that friend is you, ay."

"Then," said she, "I'll do a downright brazen thing, now my hand is in. I declare I'll tell you how to secure me. You make me plight my troth with you this minute, and exchange rings with you, *whether I like or not*; engage my honour in this foolish business, and, if you do that, I really do think you will have me in spite of them all. But there—la!—am I worth all this trouble?"

Griffith did not share this chilling doubt. He poured forth his gratitude, and then told her he

had got his mother's ring on his finger ; "I meant to ask you to wear it," said he.

"And why didn't you?"

"Because you became an heiress all of a sudden."

"Well, what signifies which of us has the dross, so that there is enough for both?"

"That is true," said Griffith, approving his own sentiment, but not recognizing his own words. "Here's my mother's ring, on my little finger, sweet mistress. But I must ask you to draw it off, for I have but one hand."

Kate made a wry face. "Well, that is my fault," said she, "or I would not take it from you so."

She drew off his ring, and put it on her finger. Then she gave him her largest ring, and had to put it on his little finger for him.

"You are making a very forward girl of me," said she, pouting exquisitely.

He kissed her hand while she was doing it.

“Don’t you be so silly,” said she; “and, you horrid creature, how you smell of wine! The bullet, please.”

“The bullet!” exclaimed Griffith. “What bullet?”

“*The* bullet. The one you were wounded with for my sake. I am told you put it in your pocket; and I see something bulge in your waistcoat; that bullet belongs to me now.”

“I think you are a witch,” said he. “I do carry it about next my heart. Take it out of my waistcoat, if you will be so good.”

She blushed, and declined, and with the refusal on her very lips, fished it out with her taper fingers. She eyed it with a sort of tender horror. The sight of it made her feel faint a moment. She told him so: and that she would keep it to her dying day. Presently her delicate finger found something was written on it; she did not ask him what it was, but withdrew, and examined

it by her candle. Griffith had engraved it with these words :

**“I LOVE KATE.”**

He looked through the window, and saw her examine it by the candle. As she read the inscription, her face, glorified by the light, assumed a celestial tenderness he had never seen it wear before.

She came back and leaned eloquently out as if she would fly to him.

“Ah, Griffith ! Griffith !” she murmured ; and, somehow or other, their lips met in spite of all the difficulties, and grew together in a long and tender embrace.

It was the first time she had ever given him more than her hand to kiss ; and the rapture repaid him for all.

But, as soon as she had made this great advance, virginal instinct suggested a proportionate retreat.

“You must go to bed,” she said, austere; “you will catch your death of cold out here.”

He remonstrated: she insisted. He held out: she smiled sweetly in his face, and shut the window in it pretty sharply, and disappeared. He went disconsolately down his ivy ladder. As soon as he was at the bottom, she opened the window again, and asked him, demurely, if he would do something to oblige her.

He replied like a lover; he was ready to be cut in pieces, drawn asunder with wild horses, and so on.

“Oh, I know you would do anything stupid for me,” said she; “but will you do something clever for a poor girl that is in a fright at what she is going to do for you?”

“Give your orders, mistress,” said Griffith; “and don’t talk of me obliging you. I feel quite ashamed to hear you talk so: to-night especially.”

“Well, then,” said Kate, “first and foremost, I

want you to throw yourself on Father Francis's neck."

"I'll throw myself on Father Francis's neck," said Griffith, stoutly. "Is that all?"

"No; nor half. Once upon his neck you must say something. There—I had better settle the very words, or perhaps you will make a mess of it. Say after me now: Oh, Father Francis, 'tis to you I owe her."

"Oh, Father Francis, 'tis to you I owe her."

"You and I are friends for life."

"You and I are friends for life."

"And mind, there is always a bed in our home for you, and a plate at our table, and a right welcome, come when you will."

Griffith repeated this last correctly; but, when requested to say the whole, broke down. Kate had to repeat the oration a dozen times; and he said it after her, like a Sunday-school scholar, till he had it pat.

The task achieved, he inquired of her what Father Francis was to say in reply.

At this question Kate showed considerable alarm.

“Gracious Heavens!” she cried; “you must not stop talking to him; he will turn you inside out, and I shall be undone. Nay, you must gabble those words out, and then run away as hard as you can gallop.”

“But is it true?” asked Griffith: “is he so much my friend?”

“Hum!” said Kate; “it is quite true; and he is not at all your friend. There, don’t you puzzle yourself, and pester me; but do as you are bid, or we are both undone.”

Quelled by a menace so mysterious, Griffith promised blind obedience; and Kate thanked him and bade him good-night; and ordered him peremptorily to bed.

He went.

She beckoned him back.

He came.

She leaned out, and inquired, in a soft delicious whisper, as follows: "Are you happy, dearest?"

"Ay, Kate, the happiest of the happy."

"Then so am I," she murmured.

And now she slowly closed the window, and gradually retired from the eyes of her enraptured lover.



## CHAPTER XII.

BUT, while Griffith was thus sweetly employed, his neglected guests were dispersing, not without satirical comments on their truant host. Two or three, however, remained, and slept in the house, upon special invitation. And that invitation came from Squire Peyton. He chose to conclude that Griffith, disappointed by the will, had vacated the premises in disgust, and had left him in charge of them : accordingly he assumed the master with alacrity, and ordered beds for Neville, and Father Francis, and Major Rickards, and another. The weather was inclement, and the roads heavy ; so

the gentlemen thus distinguished accepted Mr. Peyton's offer cordially.

There were a great many things sung and said at the festive board in the course of the evening ; but very few of them would amuse or interest the reader, as they did the hearers. One thing, however, must not be passed by, as it had its consequences : Major Rickards drank bumpers apiece to the King, the Prince, Church and State, the Army, the Navy, and Kate Peyton. By the time he got to her, two-thirds of his discretion had oozed away in loyalty, *esprit du corps*, and port wine ; so he sang the young lady's praises in vinous terms, and of course immortalized the very exploit she most desired to consign to oblivion : *Arma viraginemque canebat*. He sang the duel : and in a style which I could not, consistently with the interests of literature, reproduce on a larger scale. Hasten we to the concluding versicles of his song.

“So then, sir, we placed our men for the third time, and you may take my word for it, one or both of these heroes would have bit the dust at that discharge; but, by Jove, sir, just as they were going to pull trigger, in galloped your adorable daughter, and swooned off her foaming horse in the middle of us. Disarmed us, sir, in a moment, melted our valour, bewitched our senses; and the great God of War had to retreat before little Cupid, and the charms of beauty in distress.”

“Little idiot!” observed the tender parent; and was much distempered.

He said no more about it to Major Rickards; but, when they all retired for the night, he undertook to show Father Francis his room, and sat in it with him a good half-hour talking about Kate.

“Here’s a pretty scandal!” said he: “I must marry the silly girl out of hand, before this gets wind; and you must help me.”

In a word, the result of the conference was, that

Kate should be publicly engaged to Neville to-morrow, and married to him as soon as her month's mourning should be over.

The conduct of the affair was confided to Father Francis, as having unbounded influence with her.

## CHAPTER XIII.

NEXT morning Mr. Peyton was up betimes in his character of Host, and ordered the servants about, and was in high spirits; only they gave place to amazement when Griffith Gaunt came down, and played the Host; and was in high spirits.

Neville too watched his rival, and was puzzled at his radiancy.

So breakfast passed in general mystification. Kate, who could have thrown a light, did not come down to breakfast. She was on her defence.

She made her first appearance out of doors.

Very early in the morning, Mr. Peyton, in his quality of master, had ordered the gardener to cut

and sweep the snow off the gravel walk that went round the lawn. And on this path Miss Peyton was seen walking briskly to and fro in the frosty, but sunny air.

Griffith saw her first, and ran out to bid her good-morning.

Her reception of him was a farce: she made him a stately curtsy for the benefit of the three faces glued against the panes; but her words were incongruous. "You wretch," said she, "don't come here: hide about, dearest, till you see me with Father Francis. I'll raise my hand *so*, when you are to cuddle him; and fib. There, make me a low bow, and retire."

He obeyed, and the whole thing looked mighty formal and ceremonious from the breakfast-room.

"With your good leave, gentlemen," said Father Francis, drily, "I will be the next to pay my respects to her." With this he opened the window and stepped out.

Kate saw him, and felt very nervous : she met him with apparent delight.

He bestowed his morning benediction on her, and then they walked silently side by side on the gravel ; and from the dining-room window it looked like anything but what it was—a fencing match.

Father Francis was the first to break silence. He congratulated her on her good fortune, and on the advantage it might prove to the true Church.

Kate waited quietly till he had quite done, and then said, “What, I may go into a convent *now*, that I can bribe the door open?”

The scratch was feline, feminine, sudden, and sharp. But alas, Father Francis only smiled at it : though not what we call spiritually-minded, he was a man of a Christian temper. “Not with my good will, my daughter,” said he ; “I am of the same mind still, and more than ever. You must marry forthwith, and rear children in the true faith.”

“What a hurry you are in.”

“Your own conduct has made it necessary.”

“Why, what have I done now?”

“No harm; it was a good and humane action, to prevent bloodshed; but the world is not always worthy of good actions. People are beginning to make free with your name, for your interfering in the duel.”

Kate fired up. “Why can’t people mind their own business?”

“I do not exactly know,” said the priest, coolly; “nor is it worth inquiring: we must take human nature as it is, and do for the best. You must marry him, and stop their tongues.”

Kate pretended to reflect. “I believe you are right,” said she, at last; “and indeed I must do as you would have me; for, to tell the truth—in an unguarded moment—I pitied him so—that I half promised I *would*.”



"Indeed !" said Father Francis. "This is the first I have heard of it."

Kate replied that was no wonder ; for it was only last night she had so committed herself.

"Last night !" said Father Francis ; "how can that be ? He was never out of my sight till we went to bed."

"Oh, there I beg to differ," said the lady. "While you were all tippling in the dining-room, he was better employed ; making love by moonlight. And, oh what a terrible thing opportunity is ; and the moon another. There ! what with the moonlight—and my pitying him so—and all he has suffered for me—and my being rich now, and having something to give him—we two are engaged. See, else : this was his mother's ring ; and he has mine."

"Mr. Neville ?"

"Mr. Neville ? No. My old servant, to be sure. What, do you think I would go and marry

for wealth, when I have enough and to spare of my own? Oh! what an opinion you must have of me."

Father Francis was staggered by this adroit thrust. However, after a considerable silence, he recovered himself, and inquired, gravely, why she had given him no hint of all this the other night, when he had diverted her from a convent and advised her to marry Neville.

"That you never did, I'll be sworn," said Kate.

Father Francis reflected. "Not in so many words, perhaps; but I said enough to show you."

"Oh!" said Kate, "such a matter was too serious for hints and innuendoes: if you wanted me to jilt my old servant and wed an acquaintance of yesterday, why not say so plainly? I dare say I should have obeyed you, and been unhappy for life; but now my honour is solemnly engaged; my faith is plighted; and were even you to urge me to break faith, and behave dis-

honourably, I should resist. I would liever take poison, and die."

Father Francis looked at her steadily, and she coloured to the brow.

"You are a very apt young lady," said he; "you have outwitted your director. That may be my fault as much as yours; so I advise you to provide yourself with another director, whom you will be unable, or unwilling, to outwit."

Kate's high spirit fell before this: she turned her eyes, full of tears, on him.

"Oh, do not desert me, now that I shall need you more than ever to guide me in my new duties. Forgive me; I did not know my own heart—quite. I'll go into a convent now, if I must; but I can't marry any man but poor Griffith. Ah, father, he is more generous than any of us. Would you believe it? when he thought Bolton and Hernshaw were coming to him, he said if I married him I should have the

money to build a convent with. He knows how fond I am of a convent."

"He was jesting: his religion would not allow it."

"His religion!" cried Kate. Then, lifting her eyes to Heaven, and looking just like an angel, "Love is *his* religion!" said she, warmly.

"Then his religion is Heathenism," said the priest, grimly.

"Nay, there is too much charity in it for that," retorted Kate, keenly.

Then she looked down like a cunning, guilty thing, and murmured, "One of the things I esteem him for is he always speaks well of *you*. To be sure just now the poor soul thinks you are his best friend with me. But that is my fault: I as good as told him so: and it is true, after a fashion; for you kept me out of the convent that was his only real rival. Why, here he comes. Oh, father, now don't you go and tell him you side with Mr. Neville."

At this crisis Griffith, who, to tell the truth, had received a signal from Kate, rushed at Father Francis, and fell upon his neck, and said with great rapidity, "Oh, Father Francis, 'tis to you I owe her—you and I are friends for life. So long as we have a house there is a bed in it for you, and whilst we have a table to sit down to, there's a plate at it for you, and a welcome come when you will."

Having gabbled these words he winked at Kate, and fled swiftly.

Father Francis was taken aback a little by this sudden burst of affection.

First he stared—then he knitted his brows—then he pondered.

Kate stole a look at him, and her eyes sought the ground.

"That is the gentleman you arranged matters with last night?" said he, drily.

"Yes," replied Kate, faintly.

“Was this scene part of the business?”

“Oh father!”

“Why I ask, he did it so unnatural. Mr. Gaunt is a worthy, hospitable gentleman; he and I are very good friends; and really I never doubted that I should be welcome in his house—until this moment.”

“And can you doubt it now?”

“Almost: his manner just now was so hollow, so forced: not a word of all that came from his heart, you know.”

“Then his heart is changed very lately.”

The priest shook his head. “Anything more like a puppet, and a parrot to boot, I never saw. ’Twas done so timely too; he ran in upon our discourse. Let me see your hand, mistress. Why, where is the string with which you pulled yonder machine in so pat upon the word?”

“Spare me!” muttered Kate, faintly.

“Then do you drop deceit and the silly cunning

of your sex, and speak to me from your heart, or not at all." (Diapason.)

At this Kate began to whimper. "Father," she said, "show me some mercy." Then, suddenly clasping her hands: "HAVE PITY ON HIM, AND ON ME."

This time Nature herself seemed to speak, and the eloquent cry went clean through the priest's heart. "Ah!" said he; and his own voice trembled a little: "now you are as strong as your cunning was weak. Come; I see how it is with you; and I am human, and have been young, and a lover into the bargain, before I was a priest. There, dry thy eyes, child, and go to thy room: he thou couldst not trust shall bear the brunt for thee; this once."

Then Kate bowed her fair head and kissed the horrid paw of him that had administered so severe but salutary a pat. She hurried away upstairs, right joyful at the unexpected turn things had taken.

Father Francis, thus converted to her side, lost no time: he walked into the dining-room and told Neville he had bad news for him. "Summon all your courage, my young friend," he said, with feeling; "and remember that this world is full of disappointments."

Neville said nothing; but rose and stood rather pale, waiting like a man for the blow. Its nature he more than half guessed: he had been at the window.

It fell.

"She is engaged to Gaunt, since last night: and she loves him."

"The double-faced jade!" cried Peyton, with an oath. "The heartless coquette!" groaned Neville.

Father Francis made excuses for her:—"Nay, nay, she is not the first of her sex that did not know her own mind all at once. Besides, we men



are blind in matters of love : perhaps a woman would have read her from the first. After all she was not bound to give us the eyes to read a female heart."

He next reminded Neville that Gaunt had been her servant for years. "You knew that," said he, "yet you came between them——at your peril. Put yourself in his place : say you had succeeded : would not his wrong be greater than yours is now? Come, be brave ; be generous ; he is wounded, he is disinherited ; only his love is left him : 'tis the poor man's lamb ; and would you take it?"

"Oh, I have not a word to say against the *man*," said George, with a mighty effort.

"And what use quarrelling with a woman?" suggested the practical priest.

"None whatever," said George, sullenly. After a moment's silence he rang the bell feverishly. "Order my horse round directly," said he : then

he sat down, and buried his face in his hands, and did not, and could not, listen to the voice of consolation.

Now the house was full of spies in petticoats, amateur spies, that ran and told the mistress everything of their own accord, to curry favour.

And this no doubt was the cause that, just as the groom walked the piebald out of the stable towards the hall door, a maid came to Father Francis with a little note: he opened it, and found these words written faintly, in a fine Italian hand:—

“I scarce knew my own heart till I saw him wounded and poor, and myself rich at his expense. Entreat Mr. Neville to forgive me.”

He handed the note to Neville without a word.

Neville read it, and his lip trembled; but he said nothing, and presently went out into the

hall, and put on his hat, for he saw his nag at the door.

Father Francis followed him, and said, sorrowfully, "What, not one word in reply to so humble a request?"

"Well, here's my reply," said George, grinding his teeth. "She knows French, though she pretends not.

"*Le bruit est pour le fat, la plainte est pour le sot,  
L'honnête homme trompé s'éloigne et ne dit mot.*"

And with this he galloped furiously away.

He buried himself at Neville's Cross for several days, and would neither see nor speak to a soul. His heart was sick, his pride lacerated. He even shed some scalding tears in secret; though to look at him that seemed impossible.

So passed a bitter week: and in the course of it he bethought him of the tears he had made a true Italian lady shed; and never pitied her a grain till now.

He was going abroad: on his desk lay a little crumpled paper. It was Kate's entreaty for forgiveness. He had ground it in his hand, and ridden away with it.

Now he was going away, he resolved to answer her.

He wrote a letter full of bitter reproaches; read it over; and tore it up.

He wrote a satirical and cutting letter: read it; and tore it up.

He wrote her a mawkish letter; read it; and tore it up.

The priest's words, scorned at first, had sunk into him a little.

He walked about the room, and tried to see it all like a bystander.

He examined her writing closely: the pen had scarcely marked the paper. They were the timidest strokes. The writer seemed to kneel to him. He summoned all his manhood, his forti-

tude, his generosity, and, above all, his high-breeding; and produced the following letter; and this one he sent:—

“MISTRESS KATE, — I leave England to-day for your sake; and shall never return unless the day shall come when I can look on you but as a friend. The love that ends in hate, that is too sorry a thing to come betwixt you and me.

“If you have used me ill, your punishment is this; you have given me the right to say to you —I forgive you.

“GEORGE NEVILLE.”

And he went straight to Italy.

Kate laid his note upon her knee, and sighed deeply; and said, “Poor fellow! How noble of him! What *can* such men as this see in any woman to go and fall in love with her?”

Griffith found her with a tear in her eye. He took her out walking, and laid all his radiant plans of wedded life before her. She came back flushed, and beaming with complacency and beauty.

Old Peyton was brought to consent to the marriage. Only he attached one condition, that Bolton and Hernshaw should be settled on Kate for her separate use.

To this Griffith assented readily; but Kate refused plump. "What, give him *myself*, and then grudge him my *estates*!" said she, with a look of lofty and beautiful scorn at her male advisers.

But Father Francis, having regard to the temporal interests of his Church, exerted his strength and pertinacity, and tired her out; so those estates were put into trustees' hands, and tied up as tight as wax.

This done, Griffith Gaunt and Kate Peyton

were married, and made the finest pair that wedded in the county that year.

As the bells burst into a merry peal, and they walked out of church man and wife, their path across the churchyard was strewed thick with flowers, emblematic no doubt of the path of life that lay before so handsome a couple.

They spent the honeymoon in London, and tasted earthly felicity.

Yet did not quarrel after it; but subsided into the quiet complacency of wedded life.

## CHAPTER XIV.

MR. and MRS. GAUNT lived happily together—as times went.

A fine girl and boy were born to them; and need I say how their hearts expanded and exulted; and seemed to grow twice as large.'

The little boy was taken from them at three years old: and how can I convey to any but a parent the anguish of that first bereavement?

Well, they suffered it together, and that poignant grief was one tie more between them.

For many years they did not furnish any exciting or even interesting matter to this narrator. And all the better for them: without these happy periods of dulness our lives would be hell, and



our hearts eternally bubbling and boiling in a huge pot made hot with thorns.

In the absence of striking incidents, it may be well to notice the progress of character, and note the tiny seeds of events to come.

Neither the intellectual nor the moral character of any person stands stock-still: a man improves, or he declines. Mrs. Gaunt had a great taste for reading; Mr. Gaunt had not: what was the consequence? at the end of seven years the lady's understanding had made great strides; the gentleman's had, apparently, retrograded.

Now we all need a little excitement, and we all seek it, and get it by hook or by crook. The girl, who satisfies that natural craving with what the canting dunces of the day call a "sensational" novel, and the girl, who does it by waltzing till daybreak, are sisters; only one obtains the result intellectually, and the other obtains it like a young animal, and a pain in her empty head next day.

Mrs. Gaunt could enjoy company, but was never dull with a good book. Mr. Gaunt was a pleasant companion, but dull out of company. So, rather than not have it, he would go to the parlour of the "Red Lion," and chat and sing with the yeomen and rollicking young squires that resorted thither : and this was matter of grief and astonishment to Mrs. Gaunt.

It was balanced by good qualities she knew how to appreciate. Morals were much looser then than now ; and more than one wife of her acquaintance had a rival in the village, or even among her own domestics ; but Griffith had no loose inclinations of that kind, and never gave her a moment's uneasiness. He was constancy and fidelity in person.

Sobriety had not yet been invented. But Griffith was not so intemperate as most squires ; he could always mount the stairs to tea, and generally without staggering.

He was uxorious, and it used to come out after his wine. This Mrs. Gaunt permitted at first, but by-and-by says she, expanding her delicate nostrils, "You may be as affectionate as you please dear, and you may smell of wine, if you will ; but please not to smell of wine and be affectionate at the same moment. I value your affection too highly to let you disgust me with it."

And the model husband yielded to this severe restriction, and, as it never occurred to him to give up his wine, he forebore to be affectionate in his cups.

One great fear Mrs. Gaunt had entertained before marriage, ceased to haunt her. Now and then her quick eye saw Griffith writhe at the great influence her director had with her ; but he never spoke out to offend her, and she, like a good wife, saw, smiled, and adroitly, tenderly soothed : and this was nothing compared to what she had feared.

Griffith saw his wife admired by other men, yet never chid nor chafed. The merit of this belonged in a high degree to herself. The fact is, that Kate Peyton, even before marriage, was not a coquette at heart, though her conduct might easily bear that construction: and she was now an experienced matron, and knew how to be as charming as ever, yet check or parry all approaches of gallantry on the part of her admirers. Then Griffith observed how delicate and prudent his lovely wife was, without ostentatious prudery; and his heart was at peace.

He was the happier of the two, for he looked up to his wife, as well as loved her, whereas she was troubled at times with a sense of superiority to her husband. She was amiable enough, and wise enough, to try and shut her eyes to it; and often succeeded; but not always.

Upon the whole, they were a contented couple; though the lady's dreamy eyes seemed still to be

exploring earth and sky in search of something they had not yet found, even in wedded life.

They lived at Hernshaw. A letter had been found among Mr. Charlton's papers explaining his will. He counted on their marrying, and begged them to live at the castle. He had left it on his wife's death; it reminded him too keenly of happier days; but, as he drew near his end, and must leave all earthly things, he remembered the old house with tenderness, and put out his dying hand to save it from falling into decay.

Unfortunately considerable repairs were needed, and, as Kate's property was tied up so tight, Griffith's two thousand pounds went in repairing the house, lawn, park railings, and walled gardens; went, every penny, and left the bridge over the lake still in a battered, rotten, and, in a word, picturesque condition.

This lake was, by the older inhabitants, sometimes called the "mere," and sometime the "fish-

pools ;" it resembled an hour-glass in shape, only curved like a crescent.

In mediæval times it had no doubt been a main defence of the place. It was very deep in parts, especially at the waist or narrow that was spanned by the decayed bridge. There were hundreds of carp and tench in it older than any he in Cumberland, and also enormous pike and eels ; and fish from one to five pounds' weight by the million. The water literally teemed from end to end ; and this was a great comfort to so good a Catholic as Mrs. Gaunt. When she was seized with a desire to fast, and that was pretty often, the gardener just went down to the lake and flung a casting-net in some favourite hole, and drew out half a bushel the first cast ; or planted a flue-net round a patch of weeds, then belaboured the weeds with a long pole, and a score of fine fish were sure to run out into the meshes.

The "mere" was clear as plate-glass, and came

to the edge of the shaven lawn, and reflected flowers, turf, and overhanging shrubs, deliciously.

Yet an ill name brooded over its seductive waters. For two persons had been drowned in it during the last hundred years: and the last one was the parson of the parish, returning from the Squire's dinner in the normal condition of a guest, at that epoch. But what most affected the popular mind, was, not the jovial soul hurried into eternity, but the material circumstance that the greedy pike had cleared the flesh off his bones in a single night; so that little more than a skeleton, with here and there a black rag hanging to it, had been recovered next morning.

This ghastly detail being stoutly maintained and constantly repeated by two ancient eye-witnesses, whose one melo-dramatic incident and treasure it was, the rustic mind saw no beauty whatever in those pellucid waters, where flowers did glass themselves.

As for the women of the village, they looked on this sheet of water as a trap for their poor bodies, and those of their children, and spoke of it as a singular hardship in their lot, that Hernshaw mere had not been filled up threescore years ago.

The castle itself was no castle, nor had it been for centuries: it was just a house with battlements; but attached to the stable was an old square tower that really had formed part of the mediæval castle.

However, that unsubstantial shadow, a name, is often more durable than the thing; especially in rural parts: but, indeed, what is there in a name for Time's teeth to catch hold of?

Though no castle, it was a delightful abode. The drawing-room and dining-room had both spacious bay windows, opening on to the lawn that sloped very gradually down to the clear lake, and there was mirrored. On this sweet



lawn the inmates and guests walked for sun and mellow air, and often played bowls at eventide.

On the other side was the drive up to the house door, and a sweep, or small oval plot, of turf, surrounded by gravel; and a gate at the corner of this sweep opened into a grove of the grandest old spruce firs in the island.

This grove, dismal in winter, and awful at night, was deliciously cool and sombre in the dog days. The trees were spires, and their great stems stood serried like infantry in column, and flung a mighty canopy of sombre plumes over head. A strange, antique, and classic grove—*nulli penetrabilis astro*.

This retreat was enclosed on three sides by a wall, and on the east side came nearly to the house; a few laurel bushes separated the two. At night it was shunned religiously, on account of the ghosts. Even by daylight it was little frequented, except by one person: and she took to it amazingly. That person was Mrs. Gaunt. There

seems to be, even in educated women, a singular, instinctive love of twilight ; and here was twilight at high noon. The place, too, suited her dreamy meditative nature. Hither, then, she often retired for peace and religious contemplation, and moved slowly in and out among the tall stems, or sat still, with her thoughtful brow leaned on her white hand : till the cool, umbrageous retreat got to be called among the servants, "The Dame's Haunt."

This, I think, is all needs to be told about the mere place, where the Gaunts lived comfortably many years ; and little dreamed of the strange events in store for them ; little knew the passions that slumbered in their own bosoms, and, like other volcanoes, bided their time.

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